NATION

Budget for children hiked, yet it is inadequate: Experts

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BUSINESS

In FY25, 26 Nifty-50 firms have reported 4.4% YoY growth

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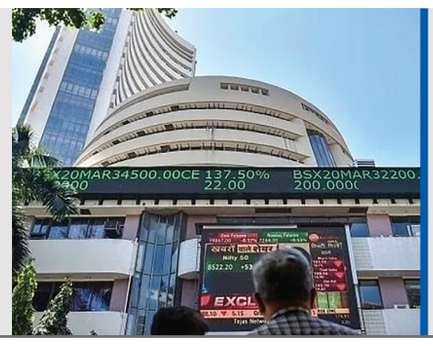

SPORTS

Praaggnandhaa, Gukesh share lead at Tata Steel Masters

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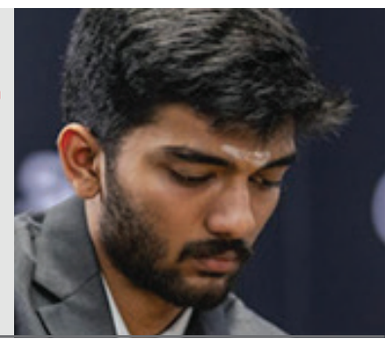

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Rupee not depreciating against any currency other than USD: FM

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday rejected criticism over the slide of the Indian rupee, saying it has depreciated only against a strengthening US dollar but remained stable against all other currencies because of the strong macroeconomic fundamentals.

In an interview with PTI, she said a 3 per cent depreciation in the rupee against the US dollar in past few months is a matter of concern as it makes imports costlier, but she rejected criticism that the local currency has seen all-round weakness.

"I will not accept the criticism that 'Oh Rupee is weakening!' Our macroeconomic fundamentals are strong. Rupee wouldn't be stable against all the currencies if the fundamentals were weak," she said.

The reasons for the rupee hitting record lows almost on a daily basis against the US dollar range from widening trade deficit to a surge in the dollar index, according to Sitharam.

> **I will not accept the criticism that 'Oh, Rupee is weakening!' Our macroeconomic fundamentals are strong. Rupee wouldn't be stable against all the currencies if the fundamentals were weak**
>
> —Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister

The Indian rupee has been under pressure in the last few months but it continues to be the least volatile currency against the US dollar among its Asian and global peers.

The Reserve Bank has reportedly spent USD 77 billion from its foreign exchange reserves to defend the rupee from falling sharply in the spot market, taking India's foreign exchange reserves down to USD 629.557 billion as on 30 January, 2024, from USD 701.176 billion on 4 October, 2024.

'Customs slash was not made for America'

In the recent Union Budget, Sitharam significantly slashed the custom duties on high-end motorcycles, cars and batteries. The move is likely to benefit American companies such as Harley-Davidson, Tesla and Apple, amidst the "America First" policy adopted by the Trump regime. Earlier US President Donald Trump had criticised India as a "tremendous tariff maker," threatening to reciprocate tariffs on Indian products. He further threatened to impose a 100% tariff on the BRICS bloc if they attempted to move away from the dollar. However, Sitharam claimed that the reduction in customs is for the internal economy and had nothing to do with Trump. —*PTI*

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PHOTO: PTI

Woman falls from scooter, run over by BMTC bus

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

A 50-year-old died on Saturday night when she fell from a scooter and was run over by a Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus near Nayandahalli. The incident occurred around 9.45pm when Saroja, a resident of Kamakshipalya, was returning from a wedding with her brother. The pair were riding a scooter along Mysore Road when a car door, carelessly opened by the driver, collided with them, causing them to lose their balance and fall onto the road. According to traffic police, the car had stopped near a timber factory in Pantharapalya. As the driver suddenly opened the door, it struck the scooter, throwing both Saroja and her brother to the ground. A BMTC bus travelling behind them failed to stop in time and ran over Saroja. Her brother sustained minor injuries. —*Salar News*

Student found hanging in RG Kar Medical College

KOLKATA, 2 FEB

A 20-year old medical student at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital died by suicide after she hung herself in her room at the ESI quarters, Kamarhati. Police believe she was suffering from depression. On the night of the incident, the mother knocked on the bedroom door, but upon receiving no response, forced the door open to find her daughter hanging. The mother, a doctor at the local ESI hospital, rushed her daughter to a nearby hospital where doctors declared her dead. "Despite repeated calls, there was no response from her. Eventually, her mother broke open the door and found her hanging. She was rushed to the hospital, where she was declared dead," senior police officer of the Barrackpore Commissionerate told. No suicide note has been found.—*PTI*

2 Indian students killed in Ireland car crash

LONDON, 2 FEB

Two Indian students in their 20s have been killed and two others remain in hospital with serious injuries after the car they were travelling in struck a tree in County Carlow, southern Ireland, according to the Irish police. Cherekuri Suresh Chowdary and Chithoori Bhargav were pronounced dead at the scene of the fatal road collision early on Friday morning by the local Gardai, or police, and emergency services. The Indian Embassy in the Irish capital of Dublin issued a condolence message on social media on The two other passengers of the car, a man and a woman aged in their 20s, were taken to St. Luke's General Hospital in Kilkenny with serious but non-life-threatening injuries. —*PTI*

US imposes tariffs on Canada, China

In retaliation Canada puts 25% tariff on US

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

President Donald Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, drawing swift retaliation and an undeniable sense of betrayal from the country's North American neighbours as a trade war erupted among the long-time allies.

The Republican president posted on social media that the tariffs were necessary "to protect Americans," pressing the three nations to do more to curb the manufacture and export of illicit fentanyl and for Canada and Mexico to reduce illegal immigration into the US.

The tariffs, if sustained, could cause inflation to worsen significantly, threatening the trust that many voters placed in Trump to lower the prices of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods as he promised. They also risked throwing the global economy and Trump's political mandate into turmoil just two weeks into his second term.

Trump declared an economic emergency in order to place duties of 10 per cent on all imports from China and 25 per cent on imports from Mexico and Canada. Energy imported from Canada, including oil, natural gas and electricity, would be taxed at a 10 per cent rate.

Trump's order includes a mechanism to escalate the rates charged by the US against retaliation by the other countries, raising the spectre of an even more severe economic disruption.

The tariffs will go into effect on Tuesday, setting up a showdown in North America that could potentially sabotage economic growth.

A new analysis by the Budget Lab at Yale laid out the possible damage to the US economy, saying the average household would lose the equivalent of $1,170 in income from the taxes.

Economic growth would slow and inflation would worsen – and the situation could be even worse with retaliation from other countries, analysts at the Budget Lab said. Canada has announced retaliatory tariffs against the US, in a move that marks the beginning of a trade war between the neighbouring countries. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau set out "far-reaching" tariffs of 25 per cent, affecting 155bn Canadian dollars' worth of American goods. —*PTI*

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46.25% of T'gana's population from BCs

Caste survey: SCs are 17% of the population

HYDERABAD, 2 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Backward Classes (BCs) other than Muslim minorities at 46.25 per cent form the largest chunk of the total 3.70 crore population of Telangana, according to the caste survey conducted in the state.

The population of BCs is followed by the Scheduled Castes (17.43 per cent), Scheduled Tribes (10.45), backward classes among Muslims (10.08) and Other Castes (13.31), OCs among Muslims (2.48) in terms of the percentage of population.

The state planning department which conducted the survey submitted its report to the cabinet sub-committee headed by state Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Sunday.

The minister said the report would be presented before the state cabinet on 4 February. On the same day, it would be placed before a special session of the legislative assembly for debate.

In terms of numbers, the population of SCs is 61,84,319, STs is 37,05,929, BCs other than Muslim minorities is 1,64,09,179, BCs among Muslim minorities 35,76,588, Muslim (OC) is 8,80,424.

Total households in the state is 1,15,78,457, while the total households surveyed is 1,12,15,134.

Telangana provides reservations to backward Muslims in the backward classes category.

Reddy, who termed the report as historic, said the survey covered 3,54,77,554 individuals (96.9 per cent of population).

He said 3.1 per cent of the population (16 lakh) were left out of the survey as they were either not available or did not show interest in participating in it.

The Congress government's comprehensive socio-economic, employment, political and caste survey, an election promise of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, was conducted for 50 days from November 6, 2024. —*PTI*

Devotees leave after taking a holy dip at the Sangam on the eve of Basant Panchami during the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj ***PHOTO: PTI***

Maha Kumbh prepares for Basant Panchami today

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 2 FEB

The Uttar Pradesh government on Sunday said it has put into place a special crowd management plan named 'Operation Eleven' for the 'Amrit Snan' on Basant Panchami at Maha Kumbh.

The 'Amrit Snan' on Basant Panchami will take place on Monday.

According to a statement, the plan, devised under "strict instructions" from Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, ensures a "one-way traffic route" for devotees and smooth movement on pontoon bridges. The heightened measures have been put in place as part of the state government's "zero-error" programme for the Basant Panchami Amrit Snan in the wake of a stampede at Sangam on Mauni Amavasya which claimed at least 30 lives and left 60 pilgrims injured who had gathered for a holy dip on one of the most auspicious bathing dates at the Kumbh. The key measures under Operation Eleven: Strict enforcement of the one-way route, enhanced security at key locations, special monitoring at Shastri Bridge, crowd control at Tikarmafi Turn, special arrangements at Phaphamau and pontoon bridges, railway stations and bus movement regulation a PAC unit has been stationed, with barricades at entry and exit points. —*PTI*

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BBMP polls likely in April/May

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Long-awaited elections for the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) are anticipated to be held in April or May 2023, sources within the BBMP told **Salar News**. The elections have faced delays for years due to legal disputes, delimitation procedures, and political factors, but mounting pressure on the state government has prompted renewed urgency.

Recently, the Maharashtra government announced civic body elections, including for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Additionally, the Supreme Court is expected to deliver a ruling on Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservations imminently, further compelling action on the BBMP elections, last scheduled for September 2020.

Sources indicate the Karnataka government is poised to issue an election notification after school and college examinations conclude in April. Senior minister R Ramalinga Reddy noted preparations for a Greater Bengaluru governance framework, with the BBMP elections contingent upon the introduction of a related bill in the assembly.

Public consultations regarding the proposed framework are slated for February, with the bill's introduction anticipated shortly thereafter. The Chief Minister's Office is also reportedly arranging financial resources for the elections, which must adhere to Supreme Court directives, leaving little room for further postponements. The official notification is expected by the end of April, and polls will occur within 45 days thereafter. —*Salar News*

Indian Embassy in Congo asks nationals to evacuate

JOHANNESBURG, 2 FEB

The Embassy of India in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Sunday said it is closely monitoring the security situation in the central African country and asked all the Indian nationals in Bukavu "to immediately depart to safer locations."

The Embassy issued three advisories during the day and recommended that everyone prepare an emergency plan. There are about 1,000 Indian nationals in Congo.

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels captured the eastern Congolese city of Goma and are looking at expanding their area of control.

The Indian Embassy also said that it is collating information on Indian nationals in Bukavu and asked asked them to urgently send relevant information such as full name, passport number, addresses in Congo and India, contact number among other details. The latest advisory has also given a number (+243 890024313) and a mail ID (cons.kinshasas@mea.gov.in) for Indian nationals. —*PTI*

India thrash SA to win U-19 women's T20 world title

KUALA LUMPUR, 2 FEB

An utterly dominant India flaunted their embarrassment of riches to win a second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title with a nine-wicket shellacking of South Africa here on Sunday, the triumph giving a peek into the game's most perfectly calibrated youth structure. Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again, getting the job done with as many as 52 balls to spare while also becoming the first team to win the tournament without dropping a single game. —*PTI*

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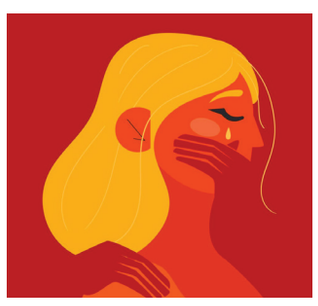
AYODHYA HORROR

Rape alleged after Dalit woman found dead in UP, eyes gouged out



AYODHYA/NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

An unclothed body of a 22-year-old Dalit woman, who was missing, was found in a desolate canal near her village in Ayodhya, with her family alleging murder and rape.

According to the family, the woman had been missing since Thursday night. They launched a search and her brother-in-law found her body in a small canal, 500m away from the village on Saturday morning. Her limbs were tied with ropes, and her body had multiple deep cuts, they said.

The family members said that her eyes were missing and that the body bore deep wounds and fractures. The woman's family accused police of inaction, alleging that officers did not actively search for her despite the missing report, and that the police had asked the family to look for her themselves.

Circle Officer Ashutosh Tiwari said that police registered a missing report on Friday after receiving a complaint.

Opposition lashes out

Faizabad MP Awadhesh PrasaD broke down in tears and said he would resign if the family did not get justice, saying he would go to Delhi and bring it to the attention of the Prime Minister.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra lashed out at the BJP as they demanded strict action against the culprits and the police officers accused of inaction. In a post on X, Rahul Gandhi said, "If the administration had paid heed to the cry for help of the girl's family that had been echoing for three days, perhaps her life could have been saved." "In BJP's Jungle Raj, no one is there to listen to the cries of Dalits, tribals, backward and poor. " Priyanka Gandhi said.

Police have launched an investigation, and efforts are underway to identify those responsible, Tiwari said.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

Taxi rams into railway platform in Kolar, causes stir

KOLAR, 2 FEB

Rakesh Gowda, a 32-year-old Uber taxi driver, drove his vehicle onto the platform of Tekal railway station around midnight on Saturday. Authorities swiftly arrived at the scene after the car reportedly toppled onto the tracks. Fortunately, no trains were in service at the time, preventing significant damage. Railway officials quickly mobilised a crane to remove the vehicle from the tracks. It remains unclear why Gowda accessed the platform, and railway authorities are awaiting a medical report to determine if he was under the influence of alcohol during the incident. The Railway Protection Force has filed a First Information Report, and an investigation is ongoing —*Salar News*

Hunt on for City woman running prostitution racket

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

The Jnanabharati police are on the lookout for a woman accused of operating a prostitution racket at a rented house in Upkar Layout. According to police, multiple residents had filed complaints, alleging the woman was luring young women from other states with promises of high-paying jobs. Following an intelligence tip-off, authorities discovered she was trafficking women for illicit activities. However, by the time police raided the house on Sunday morning, the suspect had fled. The authorities rescued the women and are now actively searching for the accused. The investigation is ongoing.
—*Salar News*

Prostitution racket busted in Kollegal

MYSURU, 2 FEB

Police on Saturday night busted a prostitution racket operating from a private lodge in Kollegal town, arresting several women, four men and a few staff of the facility. A police team led by Circle Inspector Shivamadaiah searched Hotel Jaswant in the town, following public complaints of prostitution in the hotels and lodges in the town. During the raid, people present without valid reasons were asked to vacate the premises, and the lodge authorities were warned against staying open beyond permitted hours
—*Salar News*

HM flays Union Budget, says unprogressive, disappointing

Parameshwara says Budget neglected agriculture sector

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Karnataka's Home Minister, G Parameshwara, has expressed significant discontent with the Union Budget 2025, labelling it "unprogressive and disappointing." In a statement to ANI, he highlighted the budget's failure to address critical issues such as housing for the underprivileged, irrigation projects, and educational infrastructure.

"This is the most disappointing Budget for Karnataka. We expected a better allocation than last time," he stated, emphasising the state's requests for funding for rural housing and key irrigation projects, including Upper Bhadra and Mekedatu, which remain unsupported. Additionally, he noted the lack of funding for the establishment of IITs and IIMs, asserting Karnataka's position as a leader in education.

Parameshwara further criticised the budget for neglecting essential sectors such as agriculture and industry, expressing concern that it reflects a lack of consideration by the government.

PHOTO: ANI

The Congress Party also condemned the Union Budget, with former Finance Minister P Chidambaram arguing that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has not adhered to the Chief Economic Advisor's suggestions for deregulation. He predicted average growth rates of 6 to 6.5 percent for 2025-26, contrasting sharply with the 8 percent target posited for a developed economy. —*ANI*

INDIA'S DEBT REACHED ₹205L CR UNDER MODI: CONG LEADER

MYSURU, 2 FEB

M Lakshman, spokesperson for the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, harshly criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government during a press conference on Sunday, claiming that India's national debt has surged to Rs 205 lakh crore in the ten years of Modi's tenure. He described this alarming increase as the Prime Minister's 'greatest achievement.'

Displaying empty chombus vessels, Lakshman alleged that the Central Government has once again perpetrated injustice in its budget presentation for the fiscal year 2025-26, delivered by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. He highlighted that under Modi's leadership, each citizen now bears a debt of Rs 3.5 lakh. In comparison, he noted that India's total debt was Rs 53 lakh crore during Manmohan Singh's premiership. Lakshman also critiqued the timing of a Rs 78,000 crore special package for Bihar, suggesting it was more about political gain ahead of the upcoming assembly elections than genuine concern for the state. He pointed out that despite the presence of several BJP MPs from Karnataka and the state's substantial contributions to the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the region continues to be neglected.

He further condemned the central government for reducing grants to the MNREGA scheme and failing to introduce significant measures to support farmers and enhance development. —*Salar News*

BR PATIL SAYS WILL TALK TO CM

Grants shortage due to guarantees: CM's ex-advisor

KALABURAGI, 2 FEB

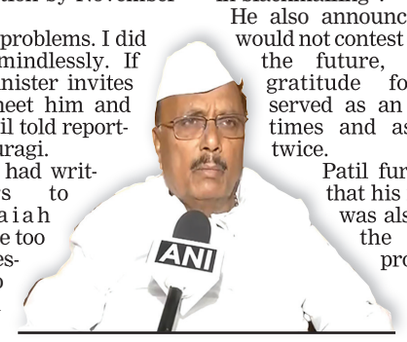
Congress MLA BR Patil, who resigned as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's political advisor, alleged on Sunday that, like other MLAs, he was not receiving grants due to the pre-poll guarantee schemes.

Patil resigned from the post on Saturday, a position he had held since 29 December, 2023. He submitted his resignation to the Chief Minister's Office in Bengaluru.

Congress had earmarked Rs 52,000 crore in the 2024-25 Budget for the five guarantees. However, party sources said that spending on these guarantees had far exceeded the budgetary allocation by November itself.

"There are problems. I did not resign mindlessly. If the Chief Minister invites me, I will meet him and explain," Patil told reporters in Kalaburagi.

He said he had written letters to Siddaramaiah twice. "But he too is under pressure due to the MUDA scam and state budget preparation but I told him that I will be with him like an intimate friend till the end," he added.



When asked about the reason for his resignation, Patil stated that he was unable to do anything for his constituency or address any other issues.

Feeling that his position as a political advisor was of "no use", he decided to step down, he added.

On whether grants were the primary reason, he clarified that, along with grants, there were other issues as well.

Dismissing speculation that he was eyeing a bigger post, Patil asserted that he was not "the kind of politician to engage in blackmailing".

He also announced that he would not contest elections in the future, expressing gratitude for having served as an MLA four times and as an MLC twice.

Patil further stated that his resignation was also linked to the office of profit issue
—*Salar News with Agencies*

'OPPN SUPPRESSED'

Cong MP Naseer accuses Waqf JPC of censoring his dissent

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain has accused the BJP-led Central government of censoring dissent in Parliament. He said parts of his dissent note on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, were redacted without taking his consent.

In a post on X on Saturday, Hussain expressed his outrage over what he described as an attempt to suppress Opposition voices within the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Bill.

"As a member of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, I had submitted a detailed dissent note, opposing the Bill.

Shockingly, parts of my dissent note have been redacted without my knowledge! The Joint Committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, was already reduced to a farce, but now they've stooped even lower – censoring dissenting voices of Opposition MPs! What are they so scared of? Why this attempt to silence us?" Hussain wrote.

His remarks come as JPC Chairman Jagdambika Pal and BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal are all set to table the committee's report in the Lok Sabha on 3 February. They will present both the Hindi and English versions of the report and lay out the evidence collected by the committee.

The JPC had said, "We have adopted the report and amended the Bill. For the first time, we have included a section stating that the benefits of Waqf should go to the marginalised, poor, women and orphans."

He also confirmed the presentation of the report to the Speaker would take place on 3 February. —*Salar News*

STRUGGLE FOR SUSTENANCE

Workers clean the glass facade of a building under the scorching sun in Bengaluru on Sunday, with the City's maximum temperature reaching 32°C
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

CM's official programme cancelled due to knee pain

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's scheduled visits to Chikkaballapura and Ramanagara were cancelled following the sudden onset of knee pain. An official statement confirmed that the Chief Minister sought medical attention at Manipal Hospitals in Bengaluru, where doctors examined his left knee.

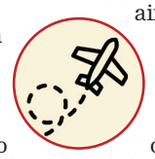
The discomfort is believed to be linked to a previous ligament injury for which Siddaramaiah had received treatment.

Doctors indicated that the pain was due to pressure on the knee, assuring there were no significant underlying health issues. Despite the concern, officials noted that it was a minor problem and the Chief Minister is in good health. —*Salar News*

KIA revises airspace closure for Aero Show

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) has issued an advisory regarding revised airspace closure timings from 5 to 14 February to facilitate the Aero India Show 2025.



According to a press release, airspace will be closed on 5, 6 and 8 February between 9am and 12 noon, and again from 3pm to 4.30pm. On 7 and 9 February, closures will occur from 9am to 11am, with an additional closure from 3pm to 4.30pm on 7 February. Additional closures on 10 February are scheduled for 9am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 3.30pm, while 11 and 12 February will see closures from 12 noon to 2.30pm. Further closures on 13 and 14 February are set for 9.30 am to 12 noon and 2.30pm to 5pm. —*PTI*

MLA raps teachers, edu officials for laxity

BIDAR, 2 FEB

Aurad (B) MLA Prabhu B Chavan has urged the education department to ensure that all government schools in his constituency have sufficient students in the upcoming academic year.

Chavan made the request on Saturday, while meeting officials of the education department at his residence at Ghamasubai Bonthi Tanda in Aurad (B) Taluk.

The legislator said there is a dearth of teachers in schools which have a good number of students, whereas those facing a shortage of students have too many teachers. In many schools, teachers do not arrive on time, and many students in grades seven and eight do not attend classes regularly. Government schools are becoming centres of mismanagement. The situation has to change to increase student enrolments, he said. "I have prioritised the development of the education sector. However, officials and teachers are not cooperating. It is disappointing that SSLC results have significantly declined in the past two years. What have you done to improve this year's results?" Chavan asked the officials. The MLA said the condition of Tanda schools has deteriorated, and some teachers are accused of drawing salaries without attending the school. "I take these matters seriously. Teachers at schools with low enrolments will be transfered," he said. —*Salar News*

Ordinance to rein in microfinance companies sent for CM's nod

GADAG, 2 FEB

Minister HK Patil on Sunday said the draft ordinance to protect the borrowers from microfinance companies is ready and has been sent to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for his approval.

Once the Chief Minister gives his nod, the ordinance will be sent to Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, he added.

The microfinance companies are recovering money from small borrowers in an inhumane way and they are giving immense torture to the borrowers, Patil told reporters here in the district headquarters town of Gadag.

In this background, the state government has prepared the draft ordinance to stop the torturous recovery of money, the Minister, who holds the law and parliamentary affairs portfolio, said.

The State government came into action after several people in rural areas died by suicide and fled their houses due to the atrocities of the recovery agents of microfinance companies.

The Chief Minister had in the past said that these microfinance companies outsource the recovery job to another agency, which uses force.

Meanwhile, Kannada activist Vatal Nagaraj staged a demonstration in Mysuru against the atrocities of microfinance companies.
—*PTI*

Will transform B'luru South, Channapatna in 3 years, says DKS

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday pledged a significant transformation for Bengaluru South and Channapatna over the next three years, reaffirming the state government's commitment to regional development.

Speaking to party workers and leaders at a celebration for Congress' victory in the Channapatna bypolls, Shivakumar remarked, "The district has strengthened the Congress party by electing four MLAs. We will change the face of Channapatna and Bengaluru South district through development."

Expressing appreciation for party members, he noted, "This is an event to repay our debt of gratitude. We thank you for your unwavering support," adding that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was absent due to an injury.

In a subtle jab at opposition leaders, Shivakumar stated, "The people of this constituency have sent a strong message to Deve Gowda, Kumaraswamy, and Yediyurappa. Your decision is resonating across the country." Shivakumar also emphasised the government's outreach efforts post-resignation of the previous MLA, with over 25,000 residents voicing their concerns. He assured swift actions on local governance issues, particularly for the Milk Producers Cooperative Society, and addressed the need to root out corruption. DK Suresh further highlighted the importance of accountability and development, stating that a grant of Rs 600 crore had already been secured. The Congress government's focus on infrastructural and economic growth positions it to reshape the political landscape of the region. —*Salar News*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at the Kanva Reservoir in Channapatna on Sunday
PHOTO: SALAR

WAS HIDING IN ANDHRA

Last Naxalite in K'taka surrenders

UDUPI, 2 FEB

In a significant development, Lakshmi, reportedly the last Naxalite in Karnataka, surrendered unconditionally on Sunday before Udupi Deputy Commissioner Vidya Kumari and Superintendent of Police Arun K Lakshmi, who had been in hiding in Andhra Pradesh, faces three cases from 2007-2008 at the Amasebail and Shankaranarayana police stations in Kundapur Taluk. These charges include exchanges of fire with police, assaults, and disseminating Maoist literature in local villages.

Originally hailing from Thombattu in Machchattu village, Lakshmi had severed her ties with her family 15 years ago to pursue Naxalite activities in the Chikkamagaluru and Udupi districts. After attempts to surrender following a government announcement regarding a surrender protocol, Lakshmi's submission was finally facilitated by the newly formed surrender committee. She expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for the generous surrender package and requested the district administration to drop the charges against her.

Deputy Commissioner Kumari confirmed that Lakshmi qualifies as an 'A' category candidate for surrender, entitling her to a compensation of Rs 7 lakh.

The package will be disbursed in phases over three years. —*PTI*

Stray dogs kill 50 goats, 10 sheep in Malavalli

MANDYA, 2 FEB

Stray dogs have caused widespread panic in several villages of Malavalli taluk, killing nearly 50 goats and 10 sheep over the past month. The affected villages, including Dadadapura, Banduru, and Kenchanadoddi, are known for rearing the Banduru sheep breed, which is highly valued, with each sheep costing between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000.

Locals have reported that packs of stray dogs have been attacking livestock while grazing, and in some cases, even biting children and elderly residents. The situation has caused significant concern among farmers, who are now calling for immediate action from the taluk and district authorities.

Dr R Manjunath, Chief Veterinary Officer of Malavalli taluk, confirmed that his department had treated hundreds of injured sheep and goats in the affected villages. He also reported that 25 animals had been killed by the dogs in the last month alone. In response, his department has provided compensation of Rs 5,000 for each animal lost to the attacks. —*Salar News*

Plaint against Sonia for calling Prez 'poor thing'

MUZAFFARPUR, 2 FEB

Sudhir Ojha, a Muzaffarpur-based lawyer, on Saturday filed a complaint in Bihar's Muzaffarpur against Sonia Gandhi for her 'poor thing' remark on President Droupadi Murmu, seeking registration of an FIR against her for allegedly disrespecting the country's highest constitutional authority. Ojha also named Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as co-accused and sought legal action against them as well. "Sonia Gandhi has insulted President Murmu by making the 'poor thing' remark. It's a disrespect to the highest constitutional authority in the country." Ojha said after filing the complaint before the CJM court inMuzaffarpur. Rashtrapati Bhavan later condemned, calling it "unacceptable." *—PTI*

'Ramayana: Legend of Prince Rama' to be screened in Parl

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Movie distribution company Geek Pictures on Sunday said it is set to organise a special screening of the 1993 Japanese-Indian anime film 'Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama' at the Parliament on 15 February. According to a press release, the screening will be attended by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla along with members of Parliament and special invitees from the cultural sectors. "We are deeply honoured by this gesture from the Parliament of India. It is a privilege to see our work being recognised at such a prestigious level." Arjun Aggarwal, co-founder of Geek Pictures, said in a statement. 'Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama' released in India with new dubs in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu alongside its original English version on 24 January. *—PTI*

Veteran TMC MLA Nasiruddin Ahmed dies

KOLKATA, 2 FEB

Veteran Trinamool Congress MLA Nasiruddin Ahmed died of cardiac arrest on Sunday, party sources said. Ahmed fell sick at his residence at around 11:50pm on Saturday and was rushed to Palasi Hospital where he died in the early hours of Sunday, they said. Condoling the death of Ahmed, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in a post on X said, "Saddened by the sudden demise of my colleague Nasiruddin Ahmed (Laal), MLA from Kaliganj, Nadia." Ahmed was popularly known as 'Laal da' in the area. "A veteran public worker and political representative, he was our trustworthy asset. He was a lawyer and a very good social worker, and I truly valued him," the TMC chairperson said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Committed to conserving wetlands: Stalin

CHENNAI, 2 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday said that his Dravidian model government is committed to conserving wetlands and would continue to take proactive steps to protect the state's rich natural heritage. "On this World Wetlands Day, I am extremely delighted to share the designation of two more Ramsar sites, Sakkarakottai and Therthangal bird sanctuaries in Ramanathapuram District, increasing the number of Ramsar sites in Tamil Nadu to 20, the highest in the country, with 19 sites designated subsequent to the launch of the Tamil Nadu Wetlands Mission in 2021." The Chief Minister, said in a post on X. "Our Dravidian model government remains committed to conserving wetlands and will continue to take proactive steps to protect our rich natural heritage." *—PTI*

BJP has resorted to hooliganism: Kejriwal

He accused BJP of assaulting workers & scribes

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP, accusing it of resorting to "hooliganism" as the Delhi Assembly elections near.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal claimed that AAP is heading towards a "decisive win" in 5 February polls, which has left BJP leaders, particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah, "baffled and desperate".

"AAP is sweeping the polls, and Amit Shah is baffled. The BJP has resorted to hooliganism because they can sense defeat," Kejriwal alleged.

He also accused BJP workers of threatening and assaulting AAP volunteers journalists and supporters.

"Our leaders and supporters are being threatened to join the BJP or face arrest and attacks. But we cannot be scared," he said, adding that Delhi will not tolerate such "intimidation tactics".

In response to the alleged threats, Kejriwal announced the launch of a new social media campaign with the hashtag 'AmitShahKi Goondagardi' on X.

He urged people to share their experiences of being "attacked, threatened, or intimidated" using the hashtag.

Kejriwal also alleged a "big conspiracy" to disenfranchise slum dwellers and economically weaker sections.

AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal addresseing the media with party leader Sanjay Singh in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

KEJRIWAL DEMANDS APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS TO EC

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal has alleged attack on his party workers ahead of the Delhi assembly polls and demanded that the Election Commission appoint independent observers in his New Delhi constituency. In a letter to the Election Commission, Kejriwal has also demanded arrest of BJP workers allegedly involved in such incidents and suspension of police officers concerned. No immediate reaction was available from the BJP and the Delhi Police over Kejriwal's claims. In the letter, the former Delhi chief minister also cited some alleged incidents of attack on AAP workers in his New Delhi constituency. *—PTI*

In a video message, Kejriwal claimed that he had received multiple calls from residents of servant quarters, dhobi ghats, and slum clusters, reporting that individuals "linked to a rival party" offering Rs 3,000 to voters.

Without naming any specific party, Kejriwal emphasized the risk of legal trouble for those who unknowingly get involved in such activities. *—PTI*

Most middle class friendly Budget: PM

PM backs 'Modi ki guarantee' during poll rally

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

As the campaigning for the Delhi Assembly polls enters its last leg, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Union Budget has brought cheer to every average household even as he called it the "most middle class friendly budget in India's history".

Addressing an election rally in RK Puram here, the prime minister reiterated his poll slogan of "Modi ki guarantee" and played up the pro-middle class provisions in the Budget which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented on Saturday.

He said "never since India's Independence have those with annual earnings up to Rs 12 lakh received such a huge relief. The middle class is saying that this is the most friendly Budget for them in India's history".

Modi said to the crowds: "Entire Delhi is now saying -- ab ki baar", and the gathering chanted, "Modi sarkar".

The prime minister later in a post on X, said, "Delhiites trust only the BJP because it does what it says. It is clear from the huge crowd that gathered in RK Puram that the 'Lotus' will bloom in Delhi." Lotus is BJP's poll symbol.

Slamming the Aam Aadmi Party government in the capital for its alleged false promises and corruption, he said its policies have led to closing of factories, adding that those who have looted people will have to account for it.

He cited examples of previous Congress regimes, where they would have to pay a large chunk of their incomes back to the government as income tax. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures as he addresses a public meeting ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

'EAGLE': CONG SETS UP PANEL TO ENSURE FAIR POLLING BY EC

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Congress on Sunday set up an eight-member committee -- Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) -- to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India. The committee will first take up the Maharashtra voters' list manipulation issue, and submit a detailed report to the leadership at the earliest, the party said in a statement. The panel includes Congress treasurer Ajay Maken and senior leaders Digvijaya Singh, Abhishek Singhvi, Praveen Chakravarty and Pawan Khera. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has constituted an Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE).

LS allocated ₹903 cr, RS ₹413 cr in Budget

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Lok Sabha has been allocated Rs 903 crore in the Union Budget, more than double the amount given to the Rajya Sabha.

A sizeable allocation -- Rs 558.81 crore of the total Rs 903 crore has been assigned to the Lok Sabha Secretariat, which also includes Grants in Aid to the Sansad TV.

Of the Rs 413 crore allocated to Rajya Sabha, Rs 2.52 crore have been assigned for salaries and allowances of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

The budget for Rajya Sabha also has a separate allocation of Rs 3 crore for the salaries and allowances of Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha and his secretariat.

The budget has also allocated Rs 98.84 crore for members.

For Lok Sabha, Rs 1.56 crore has been allocated for salaries and allowances of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and there is no separate provision for the office of the Leader of the Opposition.

There was no Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha for 10 years as no opposition party had the required numbers to be eligible for the post.

The Lok Sabha budget allocated Rs 338.79 crore for members. Lok Sabha has 543 members, while Rajya Sabha has 245. *—PTI*

Upper castes should handle Tribal Affairs Ministry: Gopi

NEW DELHI/T'PURAM, 2 FEB

Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi on Sunday courted a controversy by stating that the members of the "upper castes" should handle the tribal affairs portfolio, which he backtracked later.

Speaking at a BJP election campaign meeting in New Delhi, the actor-turned-politician said that real progress in tribal welfare would only be possible if leaders from "upper castes" oversaw the ministry.

Facing backlash over his remarks, Gopi later backtracked, claiming that his statement was made with good intentions.

"If my comment is not well received or if this explanation is unsatisfactory, I withdraw my remarks," he said.

He clarified that his intention was to end discrimination.

Suresh Gopi **PHOTO: X**

"I did not label anyone as good or bad; my only aim was to break free from this framework," Gopi said, adding that as a politician, his priority has always been the welfare of the tribal community.

Earlier in the day, Gopi, who also holds the Tourism portfolio, said: "It's a curse of our country that only a person from the tribal community can be made the minister for tribal affairs."

"It is my dream and expectation that someone from outside the tribal community should be appointed for their welfare. Let a Brahmin or a Naidu take charge, there would be significant change" Gopi's remarks triggered widespread criticism. *—PTI*

Ambedkar statue row: BJP panel lashes out at AAP

AMRITSAR, 2 FEB

A six-member panel formed by the BJP visited Amritsar on Sunday to probe the recent Ambedkar statue vandalisation bid.

Panel members, including Rajya Sabha member and Uttar Pradesh's former director general of police Brij Lal, BJP's Scheduled Caste Morcha national president Lal Singh Arya and ex-Union minister Som Parkash, paid floral tributes to Ambedkar at his statue in Amritsar.

Speaking to reporters, Lal strongly condemned the attempt to damage the statue and said such incidents cannot be tolerated.

Lashing out at AAP leaders, he said neither the AAP's national convener Arvind Kejriwal nor Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann bothered to visit Amritsar following the attempt to damage the statue.

Police on 26 January had arrested Akash Singh, a resident of Dharamkot in Moga district, for allegedly attempting to damage the Ambedkar statue at the Town Hall on Heritage Street that leads to the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

The man also caused damage to the Constitution book, which is part of the statue.

A case was registered against the accused. *—PTI*

'Fadnavis-Shinde discord hindering M'rashtra's growth'

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's "strained relationship" is reportedly impeding the state's development, claims Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut. In his weekly column for 'Saamna', Raut suggested Shinde is struggling to accept his non-reinstatement as chief minister after the 2024 assembly elections and is desperately seeking to reclaim the position.

Raut asserted that the lack of communication between Fadnavis and Shinde has become a source of public amusement, while also affecting the government's functionality. "Despite possessing a majority, the administration remains paralysed," he charged, indicating that internal conflicts within their alliance could lead to further instability.

Moreover, Raut pointed out Shinde's decreasing influence, noting he frequently misses crucial cabinet meetings and arrives late when he does attend. He also highlighted tensions arising from BJP minister Ganesh Naik's recent appointment as guardian minister for Palghar, a strategic move that undermines Shinde's authority. *—PTI*

RAUT IN TALKS TO JOIN CONG: RANE

Maharashtra Minister and BJP MLA Nitesh Rane has claimed that leading Shiv Sena (UBT) figure Sanjay Raut is in discussions with a Delhi leader regarding a potential switch to the Congress party. Rane highlighted Raut's impending end of his Rajya Sabha term, suggesting the Uddhav Thackeray-led party lacks sufficient legislators for his re-election. Raut, in his column in 'Saamana', had previously commented on the strained relationship between Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his deputy Eknath Shinde. *—PTI*

ECO SURVERY HIGHLIGHTS

Extreme weather drives food inflation in India: Report

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

India's food inflation rate has remained notably steady over the past two years, contrasting sharply with the global trend of declining prices, according to the latest Economic Survey presented in Parliament.

The government cited frequent extreme weather events as a contributing factor, particularly impacting the production of key commodities like onions and tomatoes.

The report noted that adverse weather conditions in 2023-24 significantly damaged crops in major horticultural states, exerting inflationary pressures on these food items. "India's food inflation rate has diverged from global trends, attributed to supply chain disruptions intensified by extreme weather and reduced harvests," the survey stated.

The report noted that adverse weather conditions in 2023-24 significantly damaged crops in major horticultural states **PHOTO: PTI**

Citing data from the Centre for Science and Environment, it highlighted that the area of crops damaged in 2024 exceeded that of the preceding two years due to extreme weather patterns.

The Economic Survey also referenced information from the India Meteorological Department, revealing a sharp increase in extreme weather occurrences, particularly heatwaves. Between 2022 and 2024, heatwaves were recorded on 18 per cent of days, starkly up from just 5 per cent in 2020-21. *—PTI*

TVK's politics will be centred on people' issues, says Vijay

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam chief Vijay on Sunday reiterated the party's goal of winning the 2026 Assembly election and appealed to cadres to start working in the right earnest towards that objective.

On the first anniversary of the announcement of the party's launch, Vijay unfurled the party flag and unveiled the busts of Periyar E V Ramasamy, Dr BR Ambedkar, K Kamaraj, Velu Nachiyar and Anjalai Ammal at the party headquarters here. The leaders are the guiding ideologocial icons of the party.

Vijay, on the occasion, said that the first step towards the "all time goal" of creating a huge respect for party workers among the people by way of their work for the public would be the Tamil Nadu Assembly election, due in 2026.

Recalling the outcome of 1967 and 1977 Assembly elections, when the DMK and AIADMK captured power for the first time respectively, Vijay said a similar outcome is possible in 2026 for TVK with solid work and people's support and the electorate too have started to prepare themselves to support the party.

With the party joining forces with the people, the fledgling party's chief exuded confidence of demonstrating his outfit's electoral prowess with "Makkal Sakthi" (People's power) and thereby make a reality, "the landmark democratic event" of sharing power. "You must start working right now towards that great political goal," Vijay said.

The TVK chief said appointment of functionaries at the level of districts and for the top echelons of the party was ongoing as part of work to strengthen the party apparatus. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sorry to spoil Udta Assam Party: CM tells 'local Escobars'

PHOTO: PTI

GUWAHATI, 2 FEB

Around 170 bighas (over 56 acres) of poppy farming worth more than Rs 27 crore were destroyed in Goalpara district of Assam in January, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. "Dear local Pablo Escobars, sorry to spoil your planned Udta Assam party! Because Goalpara Police destroyed 170 Bighas of poppy cultivation in the Char areas worth Rs 27.20 crore in January," Sarma said in a post on X. "So next time you think of drugs, think of the Assam police first." the CM said. He also uploaded a video, showing a tractor smashing the purported poppy plantation in the presence of a huge posse of policemen. *—PTI*

IUML backs division of Kerala's Malappuram

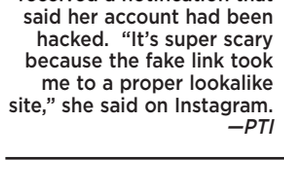
MALAPPURAM, 2 FEB

The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the second-largest coalition partner in the opposition UDF, has voiced its support for the bifurcation of northern Malappuram district in Kerala, provided the government takes such a decision on developmental grounds. Veteran IUML leader and MLA P K Kunhalikutty said the party has never attempted to create misunderstandings among people by raising such a demand out of context. He was responding to a question during a recent discussion at a literature festival here. He said a suitable decision can be made if the matter arises as a developmental issue and the government machinery makes such a decision. "Bifurcation should be implemented if it is necessary for development," Kunhalikutty stated. He made these remarks in the presence of IUML supremo Sadique Ali Shihab Thangal. *—PTI*

Bhupatinagar bomb blast: Key accused arrested

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested one more accused in connection with the 2022 Bhupatinagar bomb blast case in West Bengal that claimed three lives, officials said on Sunday. Pachanan Ghorai, a resident of Bhupatinagar, was arrested on Friday following sustained efforts by the chief investigating officer of the case, an official statement said. A non-bailable warrant was issued against the accused during the course of the probe, it added. The high-intensity blast in had kill one on the spot and caused serious injuries two others who succumbed to their injuries later. The NIA took over the investigations in December 2022 found that the blast was the result of a criminal conspiracy relating to the supply of explosives to spread terror and violence in the area. *—PTI*



X reactivates Swara Bhasker's account

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Social media platform X on Sunday restored actor Swara Bhasker's account after it was "hacked" when she clicked on fake links that falsely claimed her page had been suspended. "*AND WE ARE BACK LIKE A BAD PENNY* Thank you everyone who helped!" she wrote on X. Bhasker on Thursday said her X account was permanently suspended due to alleged copyright infringements over two posts she shared on Republic Day. She had received a fake email that said the images from her two tweets had been marked for copyright infringement, but when she clicked on the links, she received a notification that said her account had been hacked. "It's super scary because the fake link took me to a proper lookalike site," she said on Instagram. *—PTI*

Budget for children hiked, yet it is inadequate: Experts

₹1.16 lakh cr with a spike of 5.65% allocated for children

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Union Budget for 2025-26 has earmarked Rs 1,16,132.5 crore for children, representing a 5.65 per cent increase from last year's allocation of Rs 1,09,920.95 crore. However, child rights organisations have expressed alarm over shrinking budget shares and significant underfunding in critical areas such as education, health, and child protection.

Currently, the allocation for children constitutes 2.29 per cent of the overall Union Budget, a marked decrease from 4.76 per cent in 2012-13. Analysis by two child rights groups, Child Rights and You (CRY) and HAQ Centre for Child Rights, revealed that the budget for children as a percentage of GDP has declined from 0.34 per cent in 2024-25 to 0.33 per cent this year.

Education remains the top priority, with an allocation of Rs 89,420.84 crore, a 5.16 per cent increase. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan has been boosted by 10 per cent to Rs 41,250 crore, while PM SHRI Schools received Rs 7,500 crore, up by 23.97 per cent. However, concerns persist over uneven fund utilisation, as Rs 15,843 crore remained unspent in 2023-24.

Education remains the top priority with an allocation of Rs 89,420.84 crore **PHOTO: REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE**

Child health funding rose by 3.82 per cent to Rs 4,676.90 crore, while funding for nutrition initiatives saw only minor increases. With India currently ranked 105th out of 127 countries in the Global Hunger Index, experts argue that slow budget growth undermines efforts to address rising malnutrition rates among children. Child protection continues to languish at the bottom of priorities, with an increase of just 1.3 per cent, totalling Rs 1,822.45 crore. The discontinuation of the National Child Labour Project has raised apprehensions about the commitment to combating child labour.

In a concerning trend, the Ministry of Minority Affairs faced a drastic 72 per cent cut in its budget, significantly impacting scholarships and education initiatives for minority communities. Critics point to consistent funding cuts during the Revised Estimate stage, emphasising a pattern of inefficient planning and allocation. *—PTI*

An aerial view of devotees taking a holy dip at Sangam during Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Maha Kumbh gears up for Basant Panchami

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 2 FEB

As the Maha Kumbh approaches its final Amrit Snan on Basant Panchami, officials are focused on adhering to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "zero error" directive, especially following the tragic stampede on 29 January that resulted in 30 deaths and dozens of injuries.

The Uttar Pradesh government has deployed two senior IAS officers, Ashish Goyal and Bhanu Chandra Goswami, both of whom were instrumental during the successful 2019 Ardh Kumbh, to oversee operations and ensure public safety. They will work alongside Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand, reinforcing the administration's commitment to effective crowd management.

Additional Director General of Police Bhanu Bhaskar is actively monitoring crowd control from the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), issuing real-time instructions to ensure a smooth flow of devotees at the ghats. He urged attendees to avoid lingering after bathing and to consume refreshments only in designated areas.

By midday on Sunday, approximately 90 lakh devotees had already taken a dip, part of the larger 33.61 crore who have participated since 13 January. Mahant Ravindra Puri of the All India Akhada Parishad has advised pilgrims to spread out to ease congestion around the Sangam. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC to hear on safety measures at Maha Kumbh

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Supreme Court is set to hear a petition on Monday addressing the need for safety regulations for attendees at the Maha Kumbh, following a tragic stampede that resulted in the deaths of at least 30 people and injuries to 60 others on 29 January. The plea, submitted by Advocate Vishal Tiwari, emphasises the fundamental rights to life and equality under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The petition urges the central and state governments to collaborate in creating a secure environment for devotees. It suggests establishing facilitation centres in Prayagraj to provide safety information and assistance, as well as employing multi-language signage and announcements to aid navigation. Furthermore, it calls for the regulation of VIP movement to prioritise public safety and the availability of medical personnel at the venue. *—PTI*

Fresh arrest in Sambhal violence case

SAMBHAL, 2 FEB

The police have arrested a man in connection with the violence that erupted during a mosque survey in Sambhal last year. The suspect, identified as Arshad from the Khaggu Sarai locality, was apprehended on Saturday after police analysed video footage of the incident, according to Additional Superintendent of Police Shreesh Chandra.

PHOTO: PTI

This latest arrest brings the total number of individuals detained in connection with the Sambhal violence to 74, with more arrests anticipated as investigations continue. Police are actively working to identify and apprehend additional individuals involved in the clashes.

The turmoil began following a local court's ex-parte ruling on 19 November last year, which authorised a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid. This decision stemmed from a Hindu petition asserting that the mosque was constructed by Mughal emperor Babur in 1526 after the demolition of a temple at the site.

During a subsequent survey on 24 November, protests erupted, resulting in violent confrontations with security forces. The clashes tragically resulted in four fatalities and left numerous others injured. Authorities are determined to resolve the situation and maintain public order in the area. *—PTI*

India halted the construction after objections were raised and BSF was ordered to prevent further work until the issue is resolved **PHOTO: PTI**

Tripura to raise border embankment issue with B'desh

AGARTALA, 2 FEB

The Tripura government is set to raise concerns regarding the rebuilding of a controversial embankment by Bangladesh authorities during the upcoming Joint Rivers Commission meeting between India and Bangladesh. Some sections of the newly constructed embankment at Alinagar in Moulvibazar district are reportedly encroaching upon the 'zero line' along the international border, sparking discontent among residents in Kailashahar, a border subdivision in Unakoti district.

Water Resources Department Chief Engineer Sudhan Debbarma has alleged that Bangladesh did not seek Indian consent for the reconstruction of portions of the embankment located on the zero line, which violates Joint Rivers Commission guidelines. According to reports, approximately 200 metres of the 6 km embankment built during repair works following last year's monsoon were erected on this contentious line.

The Indian authorities halted the construction after objections were raised, and Border Security Force (BSF) personnel were ordered to prevent further work until the issue is resolved amicably. The Tripura government has submitted satellite imagery and a detailed report to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, following an on-the-ground assessment of the situation.

Congress MLA Birajit Sinha highlighted the issue in the state assembly, urging the central government to intervene. Chief Minister Manik Saha committed to addressing the matter with the Centre.

Meanwhile, the Tripura government is prioritising repairs to four embankments in Kailashahar to mitigate flood risks exacerbated by the Manu River. *—PTI*

India transformed remarkably in the last decade: UNGA

UNITED NATIONS, 2 FEB

UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has hailed India's "remarkable transformation" over the past decade as he prepares for his first official visit to the country from 4 to 8 February. In an exclusive interview, Yang emphasised that the trip would allow him to observe how digital and technological innovations have driven progress across India, particularly at grassroots levels.

As the world's largest democracy and fifth-largest economy, Yang noted India's vital role within the United Nations.

He expressed eagerness to understand India's vision for the future of multilateralism during his engagements with Indian leadership. *—PTI*

5 killed, 35 injured as bus falls into gorge in Gujarat

DANG, 2 FEB

Five persons were killed and 35 others injured when a private bus carrying pilgrims hailing from Madhya Pradesh fell into a deep gorge in Gujarat's Dang district early Sunday morning, police said. Among the injured persons, 17 were grievously hurt, they said, adding that the victims were on a trip to religious places across the country.

The passengers started at night for Dwarka in Gujarat from Trimbakeshwar, a religious place in Maharashtra's Nashik district when, at 4.15am, the bus driver lost control over the wheels near the Saputara hill station. The bus, carrying 48 pilgrims, broke the crash barrier and fell about 35 feet into the gorge, superintendent of police SG Patil said.

Two women and three men, including the bus driver were among the deceased, according to the police.

The pilgrims, hailing from Madhya Pradesh, had set out on four different buses on 23 December. *—PTI*

Wreckage of a bus is seen after it fell into a gorge in Gujarat's Dang on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Why use invasive fish for mosquito control: NGT

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought a response from the Centre on two highly-invasive and alien fish species being used as biological agents for controlling mosquitoes.

The tribunal was hearing a plea about two fish species -- Gambusia Affinis (Mosquitofish) and Poecilia Reticulata (Guppy) -- being released in water bodies to control mosquitoes in various states.

It said the National Biodiversity Authority declared these two species as "invasive and alien" as they adversely impacted the local aquatic ecosystems by causing food scarcity for the indigenous fish species.

The tribunal was hearing a plea about two fish species being released in water bodies to control mosquitoes in various states **PHOTO: ANI**

The states which stored and released Mosquitofish were Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, while Guppy species had been released in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab and Odisha, the plea said.

The plea referred to a report by the Invasive Species Specialist Group, where Mosquitofish was listed among the 100 world's "worst invasive alien species".

"Issue notice to the respondents for filing their response/reply," a bench comprising NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and A Senthil Vel said in an order dated 24 January. *—PTI*

IN BIHAR

Woman kills stepchild, stuffs her in bag

BUXAR, 2 FEB

A woman has been taken into custody on charges of strangling her eight-year-old stepdaughter, Aanchal Kumari, before setting her body on fire and concealing the charred remains in a gunny bag, police reported on Sunday.

The grim discovery was made on Saturday night when the victim's family filed a missing person's complaint. Following this, the Dumraon police launched an immediate search operation. Upon searching the house in the Naya Bhojpur area, officers found Aanchal's charred body stuffed inside a gunny bag, hidden within a wooden box in one of the rooms.

Buxar Superintendent of Police Shubham Arya confirmed that the stepmother, during initial questioning, admitted to the crime.

"She confessed to strangling her stepdaughter and subsequently burning the body," Arya said. "The remains were then concealed in the gunny bag and placed inside the wooden box."

The police have arrested the woman based on her confessional statement and the evidence collected at the crime scene. Aanchal's body has been sent for forensic examination. However, the motive behind the alleged crime remains unclear, as the accused did not provide any explanation to the authorities.

The victim's father currently resides in Delhi, and investigations are ongoing to uncover further details surrounding this tragic incident. *—PTI*

Gangster Joginder Gyong deported to Delhi from Philippines

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Wanted gangster Joginder Gyong, who was facing an Interpol Red Notice, has been deported from the Philippines to India, according to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Gyong, sought by Haryana Police for his alleged involvement in a murder case linked to a criminal conspiracy, arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport on Sunday.

The CBI issued the Red Notice against Gyong on 25 October, 2024, to aid in his capture. Upon his arrival, he was handed over to the Delhi Police. Authorities revealed that Gyong is accused of planning and executing the murder of an individual suspected of disclosing the identity of his gangster brother, Surender Gyong, to law enforcement. Surender was killed during a police shootout. In addition to his pending charges in Haryana, Gyong is implicated in various criminal activities across states, including Delhi and Punjab, for offences such as robbery, attempted murder, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom. *—PTI*

INDIA'S 1ST HYDROGEN TRAIN

Indian Railways is set to launch its first hydrogen-powered train by 31 March, 2025. Built by Chennai's Integral Coach Factory, it will promote green mobility, support zero carbon emissions, and feature the world's highest-capacity hydrogen-powered engine
PHOTO: X

Trump's 25% tariff sparks trade war tremors

US President Donald Trump introduced a sweeping set of new 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico. China will also face new tariffs of 10 per cent.

During the presidential campaign, Trump threatened tariffs against all three countries, claiming they weren't doing enough to prevent an influx of "drugs, in particular fentanyl" into the US, while also accusing Canada and Mexico of not doing enough to stop "illegal aliens".

There will be some nuance. On Friday, Trump said tariffs on oil and gas would come into effect later, on 18 February, and that Canadian oil would likely face a lower tariff of 10 per cent.

US President Donald Trump ***PHOTO: PTI***

What Trump wants from Canada and Mexico

While border security and drug trade concerns are the official rationale for this move, Trump's tariffs have broader motivations.

The first one is protectionist. In all his presidential campaigning, Trump portrayed himself as a champion of US workers. Back in October, he said tariff was "the most beautiful word in the dictionary".

This reflects the ongoing scepticism toward international trade that Trump – and politicians more generally on both ends of the political spectrum in the US – have held for some time.

It's a significant shift in the close trade links between these neighbours. The US, Mexico and Canada are parties to the successor of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

Trump has not hidden his willingness to use tariffs as a weapon to pressure other countries to achieve unrelated geopolitical goals. This is the epitome of what a research project team I co-lead calls "Weaponised Trade".

This was on full display in late January. When the president of Colombia prohibited US military airplanes carrying Colombian nationals deported from the US to land, Trump successfully used the threat of tariffs to force Colombia to reverse course.

The economic stakes

The volume of trade between the US, Canada, and Mexico is enormous, encompassing a wide range of goods and services. Some of the biggest sectors are automotive manufacturing, energy, agriculture, and consumer goods.

In 2022, the value of all goods and services traded between the US and Canada came to about US$909 billion (A$1.46 trillion). Between the US and Mexico that same year, it came to more than US$855 billion (A$1.37 trillion).

One of the hardest hit industries will be the automotive industry, which depends on cross-border trade. A car assembled in Canada, Mexico or the US relies heavily on a supply of parts from throughout North America.

Tariffs will raise costs throughout this supply chain, which could lead to higher prices for consumers and make US-based manufacturers less competitive.

There could also be ripple effects for agriculture. The US exports billions of dollars in corn, soybeans, and meat to Canada and Mexico, while importing fresh produce such as avocados and tomatoes from Mexico.

Tariffs may provoke retaliatory measures, putting farmers and food suppliers in all three countries at risk.

Trump's decision to delay and reduce tariffs on oil was somewhat predictable. US imports of Canadian oil have increased steadily over recent decades, meaning tariffs would immediately bite US consumers at the fuel pump.

We've been here before

This isn't the first time the world has dealt with Trump's tariff-heavy approach to trade policy. Looking back to his first term may provide some clues about what we might expect.

In 2018, the US levied duties on steel and aluminium. Both Canada and Mexico are both major exporters of steel to the US.

Canada and Mexico imposed retaliatory tariffs. Ultimately, all countries removed tariffs on steel and aluminium in the process of finalising the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

Notably, though, many of Trump's trade policies remained in place even after President Joe Biden took office.

This signalled a bipartisan scepticism of unfettered trade and a shift toward on-shoring or re-shoring in US policy circles.

The options for Canada and Mexico

This time, Canada and Mexico's have again responded with threats of retaliatory tariffs.

But they've also made attempts to mollify Trump – such as Canada launching a "crackdown" on fentanyl trade.

There are legal options, too. Canada and Mexico could pursue legal action through the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement's dispute resolution mechanisms or the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The looming threat of a global trade war

Trump's latest tariffs underscore a broader trend: the widening of the so-called "Overton window" to achieve unrelated geopolitical goals.

Arguments for bringing critical industries back to the US, protecting domestic jobs, and reducing reliance on foreign supply chains gained traction after the ascent of China as a geopolitical and geoeconomic rival.

The potential for a broader trade war looms large. Trump's short-term goal may be to leverage tariffs as a tool to secure concessions from other jurisdictions.

Trump's threats against Denmark – in his quest to obtain control over Greenland – are a prime example. The European Union (EU), a far more potent economic player, has pledged its support for Denmark.

A North American trade war – foreshadowed by the Canadian and Mexican governments – might then only be harbinger of things to come: significant economic harm, the erosion of trust among trading partners, and increased volatility in global markets. *—The Conversation*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Kids, teens undercounted in TB cases, studies say

Studies have found that children and teenagers treated for multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, including those in India, are under-represented in case numbers, with researchers calling for a "focus for case-finding efforts" in this age group.

A tuberculosis (TB) patient is said to be multi-drug-resistant when the bacteria strain causing the infection has become immune to at least two of the effective drugs.

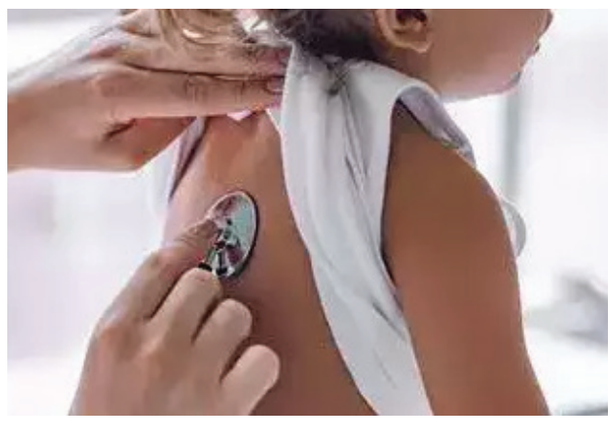
Multidrug-resistance is a significant challenge in eliminating the bacterial disease, as the complication increases treatment durations, which further risks the spread of the infection.

Researchers reviewed previously published studies to understand trends in multi-drug-resistant treatment of TB in children and teenagers aged 18 or below.

One of the reviews, by researchers, including those from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, analysed 42 studies involving over 23,369 children and teenagers aged 19 or below, mostly from India and South Africa.

The findings, published in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal, revealed that nearly three in every four children or teens were successfully treated, with treatment durations typically lasting 16 months overall.

"Younger and clinically diagnosed children are under-represented among those treated for MDR (multidrug-resistant) and RR (rifampicin-resistant) tuberculosis and should be a focus for case-finding efforts," the authors wrote.



Studies found high rates of successful treatment (almost 90 per cent) in children and teenagers ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

- Findings, published in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal, revealed that nearly three in every four children or teens were successfully treated, with treatment durations lasting 16 months overall

Rifampicin is a key drug recommended by the World Health Organisation as first-line treatment for TB.

Further, older teens between 15 and 19 years represented nearly 70 per cent of all the participants. They tend to have disease patterns similar to those seen in adults with TB and in whom it is easier to confirm the diagnosis microbiologically (through lab tests), the authors said.

They added that children aged under 5 were particularly under-represented, an important limitation as most deaths in children due to TB worldwide are in this age group and who were never started on treatment.

Another review by researchers from the University of Toronto, Canada, looked at 48 studies, including those from India.

They found high rates of successful treatment (almost 90 per cent) in children and teenagers with extensively drug-resistant TB -- when the infection-causing bacteria is resistant to nearly all available effective drugs.

However, "few childhood XDR- (extensively drug-resistant) and pre-XDR-TB cases are reported", the authors wrote in the study published in the journal PLoS Global Public Health. Treatment durations were found to range from 6 to 27 months. *—PTI*

Older teens between 15 and 19 years represented nearly 70 per cent of all the participants. They tend to have disease patterns similar to those seen in adults with TB ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

How satellites have become Earth's new health, nature watchdogs

Satellite-derived Earth observation (EO) data helps researchers like me unlock new insights into monitoring both environmental and human health.

I'm working with the European Space Agency's EO4Health Resilience project to integrate information about different types of disease into one digital platform. Due to launch in summer 2025, this project aims to improve accessibility to EO data for medical professionals, support more informed decision-making in public health and hopefully prevent more deaths from disease in the future.

Environmental and animal health are both closely linked to human health. Climate change has a huge influence on these connections, as it can make disease outbreaks such as the 2003 Sars virus and the recent H5N1 bird flu more likely.

By increasing the chance of human-wildlife contact, disruptions like deforestation can increase the risk of disease (like COVID-19) transferring from wildlife to people. Many other factors beyond medicine also determine health, such as sanitation, water supply and farming practices.

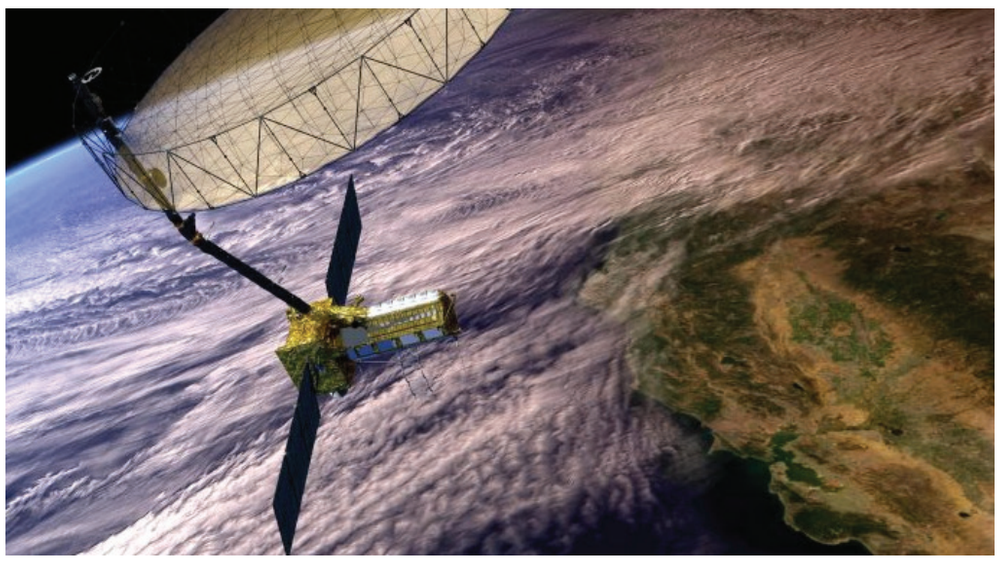
The World Health Organisation adopted the One Health approach to inspire a joint response to health threats by connecting efforts by veterinary, public health and environmental sectors.

At a time when governments are struggling to come to grips with the growing costs of healthcare, avoiding outbreaks of infectious diseases is crucial. So, the importance of identifying and monitoring areas of high risk, and of communicating the means of avoiding risks to the public rise to the fore.

Waterborne diseases

There is growing concern about the impact of climate change and human migration. This intensifies the global spread of major bacterial waterborne infectious diseases. EO technology plays a key role in tracking climate change by monitoring big areas over long periods, often in enough detail to spot changes clearly.

Many bacteria, like Vibrio cholerae which causes cholera, thrive in stagnant water. My team worked with the European Space Agency to show that its presence can be modelled using the concentration of chlorophyll found on the surface of bodies of water. Chlorophyll is the green pigment in plants that helps them use sunlight to make their food and grow.



Climate change has a huge influence on these connections, as it can make disease outbreaks such as the 2003 Sars virus and the recent H5N1 bird flu more likely ***PHOTO: NASA***

Risk maps for an entire lake can be created using satellite-derived chlorophyll data. Zoonotic diseases that spread from animals to humans such as leptospirosis (a disease caused by Leptospira bacteria) have an animal origin, but reach humans through contaminated floodwater in cities.

Bacteria such as Escherichia coli are often present in sewage pollution and can cause of diarrhoea and gastrointestinal illness. These infections typically occur through activities like drinking or swimming in contaminated water.

A recent study predicts that US cases of non-cholera Vibrio infections could rise by 50% by 2090 compared to 1995. That's because sea surface temperatures are increasing due to climate change and bacterial populations can grow and spread at warmer temperatures. Satellites could help monitor those temperature changes and therefore identify places most prone to outbreaks.

One recent report highlights the value of satellites studying waterborne diseases. The ability to measure and monitor water quality across large areas makes it much easier and quicker to deliver near real-time information.

Vector-borne diseases

Vector-borne diseases, such as the West Nile virus and malaria, pose significant global health threats. They are transmitted by mosquitoes and can lead to severe neurological diseases. Vector-borne diseases are a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, particularly in tropical regions.

The malaria atlas is a collaborative project that involves scientists from around the world. By collating EO data, mosquito breeding sites can be mapped, while climate change can be tracked as it affects the habitats that disease-carrying mosquitoes live in. Maps like this enhance the effectiveness of public health strategies by pinpointing where best to focus efforts and resources to control and prevent the spread of these diseases.

Non-communicable diseases

Non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases exacerbated by heatwaves, rank among the top global causes of death. Prolonged exposure to extreme heat can strain the heart, increasing risks of heart attacks and strokes. So, isolating locations most at risk of heatwaves could help target aid and reduce the risk of widespread heatstroke and other conditions.

For example, poor air quality caused by high levels of emissions in urban areas can lead to respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Long-term exposure to pollutants like fine particulate matter known as PM2.5 and nitrogen dioxide may increase the risks of cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer, and even premature death.

Mapping air quality using satellite data helps identify particulate pollution hotspots. This supports targeted interventions to improve public health.

In the future, satellites could track plastic pollution in oceans. Marine life consumes plastic particles that humans ingest through seafood. Chemicals present in plastics can lead to hormone disruption in humans and may increase cancer risk or immunity, for example.

So tracking pollution distribution around the globe could identify sources and the places where people and wildlife are at most risk of exposure to chemical contaminants like those in plastic. *—The Conversation*

China, Canada, Mexico hit back at Trump tariffs

Asian major vows to file lawsuit against US at WTO as other two nations plan counter-measures

BEIJING, 2 FEB

After US President Donald Trump on Saturday imposed stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, the Asian superpower said it "firmly opposes" the move and warned of taking "corresponding countermeasures" to resolutely safeguard its own rights and interests.

In a statement, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said that it would file a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization against the US for its "wrongful practice," the Global Times reported.

"China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposes US tariffs imposed on Chinese goods," the ministry said.

On Saturday Trump announced, that effective from Tuesday, the US would impose an additional 10 percent tariff on all goods imported from China on top of existing duties. Trump also announced he is implementing a 25 per cent additional tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, flanked by Minister of Public Safety David McGunity and Global Affairs Minister Melanie Joly on the left and Minister of Governmental Affairs Dominic LeBlanc on the right, addresses the media in Ottawa after the US imposed steep tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China **PHOTO: PTI**

"The unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US seriously violates WTO rules. It does not contribute to resolving its own issues, but also undermines normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US," the Chinese foreign ministry statement read.

Trump's tariff move also provoked Canada and Mexico. "The actions taken today by the White House split us apart instead of bringing us together," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said as he announced that his country would put matching 25 per cent tariffs on up to $155B on US imports, including alcohol and fruits.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum wrote on X, "We categorically reject the White House's slander that the Mexican government has alliances with criminal organisations, as well as any intention of meddling in our territory."

Sheinbaum said she has instructed her economy secretary to implement a response that includes retaliatory tariffs and other measures in defense of Mexico's interests.

If the US wanted to address the fentanyl consumption in their country, "They could fight the sale of drugs on the streets of their major cities, which they don't do," she said.

The premier of the Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, also called on residents to stop buying liquor from US "red" states and said it was removing American alcohol brands from government stores. *—ANI&PTI*

Netanyahu heads to US to meet Trump

TEL AVIV, 2 FEB

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said he will discuss "victory over Hamas", countering Iran and expanding diplomatic relations with Arab countries in his meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Tuesday's meeting at the White House will be Trump's first with a foreign leader since returning to office. It comes as the US and Arab mediators begin the daunting work of brokering the next phase of an agreement to wind down the war in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of militant-held hostages.

Hamas, which has quickly reasserted control over Gaza since the ceasefire took hold, has said it will not release the hostages slated to go free in the second phase without an end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Netanyahu, who is under pressure to resume the war after the first phase ends in early March, has said Israel is still committed to victory over Hamas and the return of all the hostages captured in the militants' 7 October, 2023, attack that triggered the war.

It's unclear where Trump stands in all this. He has been a staunch supporter of Israel, but has also pledged to end wars in the Middle East. *—PTI*

DOGE gains access to Treasury payments

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), run by President Donald Trump's billionaire adviser and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, has gained access to sensitive Treasury data, including Social Security and Medicare customer payment systems, according to two people familiar with the situation.

The move by DOGE – a Trump administration task force assigned to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programmes and slash federal regulations – means it could have wide leeway to access important taxpayer data, among other things.

The New York Times first reported the group's access of the massive federal payment system. Ron Wyden of Oregon, the highest-ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, on Friday expressed concern to Trump's Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent that "any politically motivated meddling... risks severe damage to our country and the economy." *—PTI*

US planes pound IS operatives in Somalia

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

The US military has conducted coordinated airstrikes against Islamic State (IS) operatives in Somalia, the first attacks in the African nation during President Donald Trump's second term.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Saturday said the strikes by US Africa Command were directed by Trump and coordinated with Somalia's government.

Pentagon said "multiple" operatives were killed while no civilians were harmed in the strikes.

Trump wrote on social media that a senior IS planner and recruits were targeted in the operation. "The message to ISIS and all others who would attack Americans is that "WE WILL FIND YOU, AND WE WILL KILL YOU!" *—PTI*

Militants kill five in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR, 2 FEB

Four paramilitary personnel were among five people killed when their vehicle was ambushed by the militants in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday, police said. The incident took place in Dera Ismail Khan district bordering South Waziristan. Police said the Karizat Levies personnel and a private driver were heading to recover a stolen truck in Daraban Tehsil of the district, when they were ambushed. The security forces have been carrying out extensive anti-terror operations across the country to curb the menace of terrorism in both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. *—PTI*

Pilot killed as chopper crashes in Philippines

MANILA, 2 FEB

A helicopter crashed in a northern Philippine province, killing the pilot, who was the only person on board, Philippine officials said on Sunday. The four-seat helicopter owned by a domestic carrier took off from the Philippine capital of Manila on Saturday for the northern mountain resort city of Baguio, where it dropped off the passenger, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said. From Baguio, the helicopter had landed at an airstrip in Binalonan town in Pangasinan province to refuel on its way back to Manila. Binalonan airport officials noted that "the aircraft experienced difficulty restarting its engine" before it took off, said the civil aviation authority. *—PTI*

Syria's president visits Saudi, a signal to Iran

DUBAI, 2 FEB

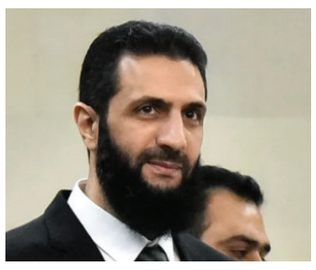
Syria's interim president made his first trip abroad to Saudi Arabia on Sunday, in a move likely trying to signal Damascus' shift away from Iran as its main regional ally.

Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, travelled to Riyadh along with his foreign minister Asaad al-Shaibani. A photo published by the state-run SANA news agency showed the two men on a jet, likely provided by the kingdom, with a Saudi flag visible on the table behind them.

Saudi state television trumpeted the fact that the first trip by al-Sharaa, first known internationally by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, would make Riyadh his first destination.

Saudi Arabia had been among the Arab nations that poured money into insurgent groups that tried to topple former President Bashar Assad after Syria's 2011 Arab Spring protests turned into a bloody crackdown. However, its groups found themselves beaten back as Assad, supported by Iran and Russia, fought the war into a stalemate in Syria.

That changed with the December lightning offensive led by al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The group was once affiliated with al-Qaida but has since denounced its former ties.



Al Sharaa **PHOTO: X**

- Saudi Arabia had been among the Arab nations that poured money into insurgent groups that tried to topple former President Bashar Assad after Syria's 2011 Arab Spring protests turned into a bloody crackdown

Al-Sharaa and HTS have carefully managed their public image since, with the interim president favouring an olive-coloured military look, similar to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, appointing women to roles and trying to maintain ties to Syria's Christian and Shiite Alawite populations.

That also includes keeping both Iran and Russia largely at arms' length. *—PTI*

Iran tests 1,000km anti-warship missile

TEHRAN, 2 FEB

Iran has test-fired an anti-warship cruise missile with 1,000km range capable of reaching US Navy ships in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman, state TV reported on Saturday.

"This is a Ghadr-380 mile type L. It has over 1,000km range. It has anti-jamming capability," said Gen. Ali Reza Tangsiri, the head of the navy of the Revolutionary Guard, in a report that showed an underground missile facility on the southern coast of Iran. It elaborated neither on warhead that the missile carried, nor the time of the test.

The cruise missile is capable of changing targets during its travel and avoid enemy radars **PHOTO: X**

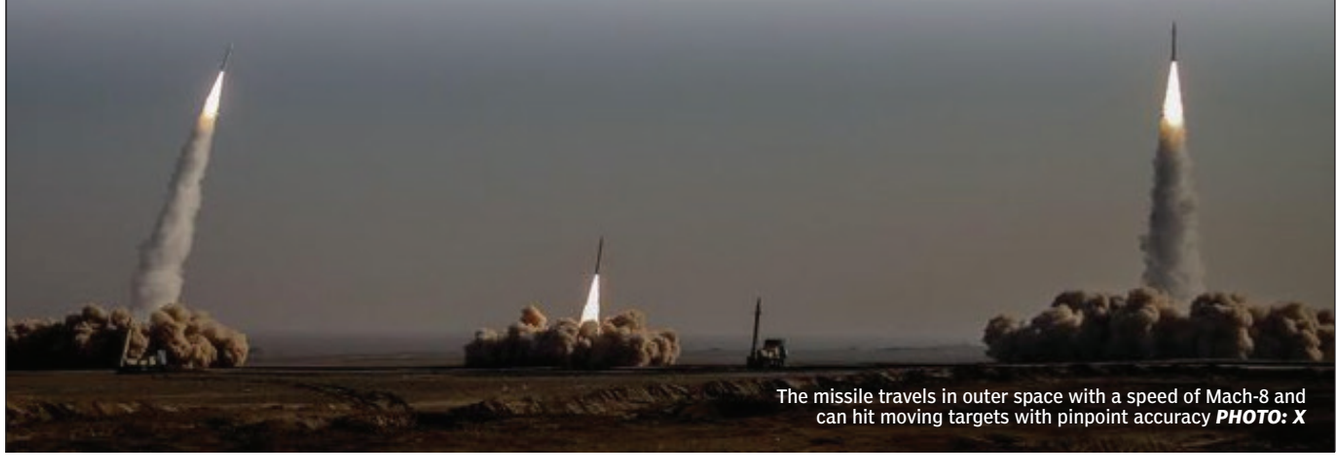
Tangsiri said the facility is "only one part of the missile systems of the Guard," adding that the missiles can create "a hell for the enemy's warships."

The report said it was a "sophisticated missile" which could be launched from the underground facility. The missile was launched from central Iran into the Sea of Oman, it said.

The missile can be made ready and launched by one member of personnel in less than five minutes, it said.

Since 2011, Iran has occasionally announced the inauguration of underground missile facilities along with missile tests. It has boasted of underground facilities across the country, as well as along the southern coast near the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Iran claims to have missiles with 2,000km range, placing much of the Middle East within range. In 2024 and during Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran launched hundreds of missiles at Israel. *—PTI*



The missile travels in outer space with a speed of Mach-8 and can hit moving targets with pinpoint accuracy **PHOTO: X**

GAME OF DEATH

Russia, Ukraine trade blame over boarding school attack

KYIV, 2 FEB

Competing claims emerged over a deadly attack on a boarding school in Sudzha, a city in Russia's Kursk region that has been under Ukrainian control for five months, with Ukraine and Russia accusing each other of carrying out the strike.

The General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said on Saturday night that four people were killed and another four seriously wounded in the strike, with 84 people rescued by Ukrainian servicemen from the rubble.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Moscow bombed the boarding school where civilians were sheltering and preparing to evacuate.

The General Staff said those in need of additional medical assistance were evacuated to medical facilities in Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed in the early hours of Sunday that it was Ukrainian forces that had launched a missile strike on the school, saying that the missiles were launched from Ukraine's Sumy region.

Firefighters douse flames and look for survivors at the site of a Russian rocket attack in Poltava, Ukraine, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile strike on an apartment block in the Ukrainian city of Poltava on Saturday rose to 12, including two children, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said Sunday. Seventeen people were injured in the attack on the five-story building, it said.

Moscow sent 55 drones into Ukraine overnight into Sunday, Ukrainian officials said. According to Ukraine's Air Force, 40 drones were destroyed during the overnight attacks. A further 13 drones were "lost", likely having been electronically jammed.

Two people were wounded in a drone attack in the Kharkiv region, regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov said on Sunday. *—PTI*

JAPAN LAUNCHES NAV-SAT ON NEW FLAGSHIP ROCKET

TOKYO, 2 FEB

Japan on Sunday launched a navigation satellite on its new flagship H3 rocket as the country seeks to have a more precise location positioning system of its own.

The H3 rocket carrying the Michibiki 6 satellite lifted off from the Tanegashima Space Centre on a southwestern Japanese island. Everything so far has been as planned, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said.

Japan currently has the quasi-zenith satellite system, or QZSS, with four satellites for a regional navigation system that first went into operation in 2018. The Michibiki 6 will be the fifth of its network.

Michibiki's signals are used to supplement American GPS to improve positioning data for smartphones, car and maritime navigation and drones.

Japan plans to launch two more navigation satellites to have a seven-satellite system by March 2026 for a more precise global positioning capability without relying on foreign services, including the US, said the Japan Science and Technology Agency.

By the late 2030s, Japan plans to have an 11-satellite network. *—PTI*

Pak Army Chief pledges to defeat 'frenemies'

ISLAMABAD, 2 FEB

Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir has vowed to hunt down the "frenemies" acting as terrorist proxies targeting the country.

Munir's comments came as he visited Quetta on Saturday following the killing of 18 soldiers during clashes with terrorists in Balochistan's Kalat district. Twenty-three terrorists were also killed in clashes.

During the visit, Munir was given a comprehensive brief on the prevailing security situation in Balochistan, the Army said in a statement.

Munir said, "Those who are acting as terrorist proxies of their foreign masters who have mastered the art of manifesting double standards of hunting with the hound and running with the hare are well known to us."

"No matter what these so-called 'frenemies' may do, you will surely be defeated by the resilience of our proud nation and its Armed Forces Inshallah. For the defence of our motherland and its people, we will definitely retaliate and 'hunt you down', whenever required and wherever you may be," he said.

Pakistan has been battling two-pronged militancy led by Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and Baloch nationalists.

General Asim Munir **PHOTO: X**

- Those who are acting as terrorist proxies of their foreign masters who have mastered the art of manifesting double standards of hunting with the hound and running with the hare are well known to Pakistan, Munir said

The two groups have been fighting for different objectives, with the TTP for the so-called Islamic system like in Afghanistan and the Baloch extremists against the alleged exploitation of Balochistan's natural wealth by the federal government.

Pakistan officials often blame the "foreign hand" for the trouble. *—PTI*

Baldoni launches portal to share his side in Lively row

LOS ANGELES, 2 FEB

The legal fight between Justin Baldoni and Blake Lively has taken a new turn as Baldoni has launched a website to share his side of the dispute, linking to legal documents and a timeline of events related to their ongoing lawsuit, according to People. The website, titled "Lawsuit Info," was made public on 1 February. It includes a 168-page timeline of messages, emails, and other communications, some of which were earlier unseen. The move follows Lively's lawsuit against Baldoni and Wayfarer Studios in December 2024, where she accused them of sexual harassment and retaliation. *—Agencies*

‘Budget is by the people, for the people’

Nirmala Sitharaman also cites India’s fiscal track record for Moody’s unchanged ratings

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday described the Union Budget as “by the people, for the people, of the people”, and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea to cut taxes for middle class but it took time to convince the bureaucrats.

“We have heard the voice of the middle class” who had been complaining about their aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers, she told PTI in an interview.

With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation, the prime minister was quick to task Sitharaman to look at ways to give relief.

Presenting her eighth straight budget, Sitharaman on Saturday announced an increase in the personal income tax threshold below which taxpayers owe no tax to Rs 12 lakh, up from Rs 7 lakh, as well as a regij in tax brackets that would help those earning higher than that save up to Rs 1.1 lakh.

The Rs 5 lakh hike in exemption limit is the biggest-ever and equals all the reliefs that were given between 2005 and 2023.

“I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it’s the people’s Budget, it is the Budget which people wanted.”

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during an interview with PTI, in New Delhi, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Asked to describe the ethos of the budget in her own words, she said, “as they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln’s words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people.”

FM cites India’s unblemished track record of fiscal consolidation to Moody’s not changing ratings

Sitharaman flaunted India’s unblemished track record of not faltering on any of its fiscal consolidation or debt reduction targets as she seemed to shrug off the passiveness of agencies like Moody’s which have not upgraded India’s ratings.

Moody’s Ratings on Saturday ruled out an immediate upgrade of India’s sovereign rating despite the government’s efforts to manage its finances prudently.

Moody’s currently maintains India’s sovereign rating at “Baa3” with a stable outlook, which is the lowest investment-grade rating.

“Equally to give a long term perspective, we have said that we will manage our debt in such a way that the debt-to-GDP ratio will be continuously” reduced.” —*PTI*

‘Strong blueprint for propelling economic growth’

NEW YORK, 2 FEB

The Union Budget 2025 has been hailed as a pivotal framework for advancing economic growth, with aspirations for India to achieve a USD 5 trillion economy, according to a prominent India-centric business advocacy group.

The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), an independent not-for-profit organisation aimed at strengthening the partnership between the US and India, described the Budget, unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, as “robust.”

The USISPF commended the Budget for its focus on financial modernisation, highlighting strategic investments and significant reforms in the tax structure. It conveyed that the Budget signals a strong commitment from India to foster a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive economic landscape for investors.

Tarun Bajaj, chairperson of the US-India Tax Forum, remarked, “The Union Budget 2025 outlines a roadmap for enhancing consumption and accelerating growth and employment.

The Budget sets the stage for a transformative phase in India’s economic trajectory. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Exporters urge Centre to revive interest scheme

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Indian exporting community has called on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to reinstate the Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES), which expired on 31 December, 2023. Exporters argue the scheme was vital for securing affordable credit during challenging global economic conditions.

Sanjay Budhia, Chairman of the CII National Committee on EXIM, highlighted that while the recent Budget proposals aim to enhance outbound shipments, the reinstatement of IES is crucial for maintaining global competitiveness.

Echoing these sentiments, Ashwani Kumar, President of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), noted a budget allocation of Rs 2,250 crore for export promotion, including IES. —*PTI*

Prestige GROUP
Add Prestige to your life

PHOTO:X

Prestige Estates sales bookings down by 38%

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Real estate firm Prestige Estates Projects Ltd's sales bookings have declined 38 per cent to Rs 10,065.7 crore during the April-December period of this fiscal year. According to its latest investors presentation, the company sold 80.9 lakh sq ft area at an average sales realisation of Rs 13,128 per sq ft during the first nine months of the 2024-25 fiscal year. Prestige on Friday reported an 85 per cent decline in consolidated profit to Rs 17.7 crore for the December quarter as against a net profit of Rs 116.3 crore in the year-ago period. Further, total income fell to Rs 1,697.9 crore. —*PTI*

Texmaco Q3 profit grows over 2-fold to Rs 76 crore

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Texmaco Rail & Engineering Ltd on Sunday reported an over two-fold jump in its consolidated profit after tax to Rs 76 crore in December quarter, riding on higher deliveries of freight cars. The company's total revenue from operations also surged 47.9 per cent to Rs 1,326 crore in the reporting quarter from Rs 896 crore a year ago. It had posted Rs 30 crore profit after tax in the year ago quarter, the company said in a statement. For the nine months ending December 2024 (9M FY25), deliveries totalled 8,015 freight cars, reflecting a 69.7 per cent year over year growth from 4,724 in the previous year. The company, part of Adventz Group, has seven manufacturing facilities -- five in West Bengal, one each in Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh. —*PTI*

HMPL plans solar project in Andhra worth Rs 2,500 cr

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Infra-to-energy player Hazoor Multi Projects Limited (HMPL) has plans to set up a 500 megawatt solar project in Andhra Pradesh at an investment of Rs 2,500 crore. It has already submitted a proposal with the state government to set up the project in Prakasam district over an area of 2,000 acres, as per information shared by the company. The AP government in a communication said New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation (NREDCAP) will facilitate for successful execution of proposed solar park project. The state government has also asked the company to submit its detailed project report (DPR) for the project. HMPL is into renewable energy and road projects.—*PTI*

‘CAG building infra & processes to harness AI&ML’

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

India’s apex auditor is building the necessary infrastructure and processes to harness artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning for auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves as the country aims to become a USD 30-trillion economy by 2047, CAG K Sanjay Murthy said. Speaking at the World Forum of Accountants hosted by ICAI on Saturday, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Murthy said a USD 30-trillion economy will be necessarily digital, as organisations expand into emerging areas, and global champions are born. Accounting and auditing professionals will have to provide the required support. Underlining the key role of digital technology as a major enabler as well as disrupter, the CAG said the range of technological solutions that are now available have transformed the scale and potential at which organisations can achieve higher performance outcomes. The World Forum of Accountants is an annual conference, and it was ICAI’s turn as host this year. —*PTI*

In FY25, 26 Nifty-50 firms have reported 4.4% YoY growth

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

As companies continue to release their financial results for the third quarter of FY25, the overall earnings growth for Nifty 50 firms has remained weak.

According to a report by JM Financial, out of the 50 companies in the index, 26 have reported their Q3FY25 results so far, showing a mere 4.4 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth. This is significantly lower than the earlier estimate of 5.8 per cent growth for the quarter.

It said "against our expectation of 5.8 per cent YoY growth (ex-BFSI growth at 2.1 per cent YoY) in 3QFY25, so far the 26 Nifty50 companies that have reported numbers have delivered only 4.4 per cent YoY growth. We have already cut the FY25E EPS growth to 3.8 per cent (from 5 per cent earlier) during 3QFY25 so far".

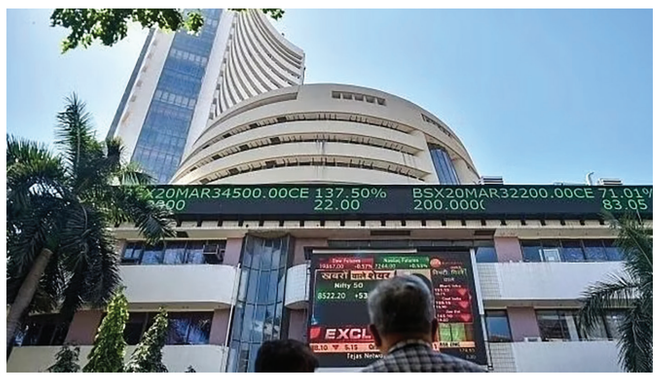


PHOTO:PTI

Due to this slower-than-expected performance, the report has also revised down the full-year earnings per share (EPS) growth estimate for Nifty 50 companies to 3.8 per cent for FY25, compared to the previous estimate of 5 per cent.

The report highlighted that Nifty 50 companies have been struggling with slow earnings growth throughout the financial year. In the first quarter (Q1FY25), EPS growth was recorded at 5.5% YoY, while in the second quarter (Q2FY25), it was even lower at 4.2 per cent YoY.

Despite the current weakness, the report remains optimistic about Nifty 50 earnings growth in the next financial year (FY26). —*PTI*

‘TO PROMOTE MAKE IN INDIA’

Committee under mfg mission to look into issues in detail: Goyal

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

A committee will be set up under the national manufacturing mission to get into the details on issues like cutting cost of doing business; preparing future-ready workforce; and availability of technology to further promote Make in India initiative, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

Representatives from the Centre, states, and private sector are expected to be there in the committee.

It would identify key focus areas, which are futuristic and where there is demand both in the domestic and foreign markets, and come up with recommendations on "what we should do".

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced the mission covering small, medium and large industries for furthering "Make in India" by providing policy support, execution roadmaps, governance and monitoring framework for central ministries and states.

PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

The mission's mandate will include five focus areas: ease and cost of doing business; future ready workforce for in-demand jobs; a vibrant and dynamic MSME sector; availability of technology; and quality products.

The country's manufacturing accounts for about 16-17 per cent of the GDP and the government is looking to increase the share.

India's industrial production (IIP) growth accelerated to a six-month high of 5.2 per cent year-on-year in November 2024, riding on the increased festive demand and pick-up in the manufacturing sector, according to data. —*PTI*

Mcap of 7 of 10 firms jumps Rs 1.83 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The combined market valuation of seven of the 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 1,83,322.54 crore last week, with Hindustan Unilever becoming the biggest gainer.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,315.5 points or 1.72 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 389.95 points or 1.68 per cent.

Equity markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) were the gainers from the top-10 pack, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Bharti Airtel and Infosys suffered erosion from their valuation.

PHOTO:X

ICICI Bank added Rs 32,302.56 crore to Rs 8,86,247.75 crore in its valuation.

HDFC Bank's mcap jumped Rs 30,822.71 crore to Rs 12,92,450.60 crore and that of ITC soared Rs 26,212.04 crore to Rs 5,78,604.05 crore.

The valuation of Reliance Industries climbed Rs 25,373.2 crore to Rs 17,11,371.54 crore and that of State Bank of India rallied Rs 19,411.05 crore to Rs 6,83,715.14 crore.

LIC's valuation went up by Rs 16,729.62 crore to Rs 5,36,201.68 crore.

The mcap of Bharti Airtel dropped Rs 11,211.96 crore to Rs 9,25,201.90 crore and that of Infosys declined Rs 9,653 crore to Rs 7,68,959.76 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and LIC. —*PTI*

SEBI plans safer UPI for mkt intermediaries

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Markets regulator SEBI is looking to come out with a new mechanism to ensure secure and efficient payments in the securities market through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in bid to distinguish legitimate financial intermediaries from fraudsters.

Under the proposed mechanism, the regulator has suggested creating a unique UPI address for registered market intermediaries, making it easier for investors to confirm that they are paying only registered entities.

The proposed UPI payment limit for capital market transactions is set to Rs 5 lakh per day, higher than the current Rs 2 lakh limit. This will be evaluated periodically in consultation with National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

However, there has been a growing issue with unregistered entities misleading investors and collecting money fraudulently.

To address this, SEBI has proposed to creating a unique alphanumeric UPI ID for registered intermediary. —*PTI*

REDUCTION IN USE OF HEAT APPLIANCE

India's power consumption up by just 3% to 137.49B units in Jan

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

India’s power consumption saw a modest rise of 2.7 per cent in January, reaching 137.49 billion units (BU), primarily due to a reduction in the use of heating appliances such as heaters and geysers following higher-than-normal temperatures. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the country recorded a mean temperature of 18.98 degrees Celsius, marking the third-highest for January since 1901, trailing only 1958 and 1990. In January 2024, power consumption stood at 133.94 BU.

Peak power demand also experienced an increase, rising to 237.30 gigawatts (GW) from 222.32 GW in January 2024. The demand soared to a record high of approximately 250 GW in May 2024, surpassing the previous peak of 243.27 GW noted in September 2023. The power ministry had anticipated a peak demand of 235 GW during daytime and 225 GW in the evening of May 2024, with projections suggesting it may reach 260 GW by summer 2024.

PHOTO:PIXABAY

Experts attribute the subdued power demand and consumption to the ongoing warmer conditions, which are expected to persist into February, leading to further reductions in heating-related power usage. The IMD forecasts above-normal temperatures and below-average rainfall, predicting rainfall in February to be below 81 per cent of the period average. Most regions can expect above-normal minimum temperatures, with only certain areas experiencing deviations. —*PTI*

Customs duty cuts to boost US exports: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Indian government's recent Budget has announced significant reductions in customs duties on various products, a move that is expected to benefit American exports, according to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). Despite former President Trump's administration labelling India as a major "tariff abuser," this Budget reflects India's efforts to enhance trade amidst a challenging global trade environment.

The customs duties on motorcycles have been reduced, with tariffs for those under 1,600cc slashed from 50 per cent to 40 per cent and from 50 per cent to 30 per cent for those above that capacity. This is set to improve market access for US manufacturers, which exported US$3 million worth of motorcycles to India in the last financial year.

Additionally, tariffs on fish hydrolysate used in aquatic feed have been lowered from 15 per cent to 5 per cent, impacting US exports valued at US$35 million. The budget also lowers duties on synthetic flavouring essences from 100 per cent to 20 per cent, with exports from Washington reaching US$21 million.

Further changes include zero tariffs on satellite ground installations and the elimination of duties on specific waste and scrap items, which saw US exports amounting to US$2.5 billion. GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava believes these reductions indicate a potential shift in India’s trade policies, which could positively influence US-India trade relations moving forward. —*PTI*

India's sugar production to fall 12% in 2025: Report

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

A report by Centrum reveals that India's sugar production is set to decline significantly in the 2025 season, expected to fall below 27 million metric tons (MMT) from 31.8 MMT last year, representing a 12 per cent decrease. This drop is largely due to increased diversion of sugarcane to ethanol production and reduced cane availability in key states.

The recent adjustments to ethanol prices have also disappointed the sector, with only a 3 per cent increase for the Chandigarh route, while expected hikes for Bihar and direct routes were not implemented. Despite these challenges, sugar prices remain robust, with Uttar Pradesh prices exceeding Rs 40,000 per ton and Maharashtra prices around Rs 37,000. —*ANI*

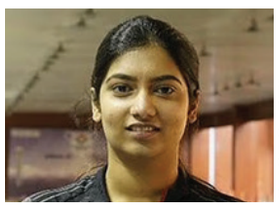


PHOTO: PTI

Ashi Chouskey creates national record in 50m rifle

DEHRADUN, 2 FEB

Asian Games bronze-winning shooter Ashi Chouksey from Madhya Pradesh broke the women's 50m rifle 3 positions national record on her way to the gold medal at the 38th National Games. The 22-year-old Chouksey, who won a silver in 50m rifle 3 positions and a silver in 10m air rifle team event at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023, scored an exceptional 598, breaking the previous record of 594 set by Sift Kaur Samra in 2023. "I worked very hard for this, and I believe the credit goes to everyone who has supported me including my coach, sponsors, family, and friends," Chouksey said after her win. Chouksey's precision, consistency and record-breaking feat reinforces her status as one of the country's top shooters —*PTI*

BCB sets up panel to probe BPL corruption charges

DHAKA, 2 FEB

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has established an independent inquiry body to assist its Anti-Corruption Unit in probing a slew of corruption allegations over the last few weeks in the Bangladesh Premier League. This marks the first official corruption investigation in the BPL since 2013 as the league faces challenge with delayed player payments and ticketing controversies. Recent media reports have alleged instances of corruption, naming specific players and matches, although these claims have not yet been substantiated by the BCB's ACU. "The BCB is in the process of establishing an Independent Inquiry Body to further support the ACU" a BCB press release said. "The BCB strictly adheres to the ICC Anti-Corruption Code for Participants and maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption in any form." —*PTI*

Namdhari reclaim I-L top spot with 2–0 win over Delhi

MAHILPUR, 2 FEB

Namdhari FC returned to the top of the I-League standings with a clinical 2–0 victory over Delhi FC at the Mahilpur Football Stadium here on Sunday. Despite a shaky start, Namdhari took the lead in the 30th minute when Bhupinder Singh finished off a low cross from Jaskaranpreet Singh. The goal shifted the momentum, and Namdhari tightened their grip on the match. A calm and composed Cledson Carvalho Dasilva then sealed the win in the 52nd minute with Bhupinder assisting with a cross. Meanwhile, Delhi FC remain in deep trouble, languishing at 11th place with just nine points —*PTI*

Klassen helps DSG end season three on high

JOHANNESBURG, 2 FEB

Durban's Super Giants ended their SA20 campaign on a positive note with a thrilling 11-run DLS victory over Joburg Super Kings at the Wanderers. DSG's Heinrich Klaasen finally gave the visiting fans something to cheer about with a 76 not out off 47 balls (3x4, 6x6), becoming the first batter to pass 1000 runs in Betway SA20. Klaasen shared two solid partnerships of 64 off 43 balls with Kane Williamson (22) and an unbroken 70 off 43 balls with Wiaan Mulder (30 not out) to lift DSG up to 173/4. JSK were unable to gain momentum after rain interrupted play. As a result, JSK finished fourth on the group stage and will face third-placed Sunrisers Eastern Cape in the Eliminator at Centurion on Wednesday —*PTI*

India beat SA to retain U-19 Women's T20 World Cup

Trisha emerges star of the day, topping 3/15 with 33-ball 44

KUALA LUMPUR, 2 FEB

Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again **PHOTO: PTI**

An utterly dominant India flaunted their embarrassment of riches to win a second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title with a nine-wicket shellacking of South Africa here on Sunday, the triumph giving a peek into the game's most perfectly calibrated youth structure.

Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again, getting the job done with as many as 52 balls to spare while also becoming the first team to win the tournament without dropping a single game.

The biggest star of the day was all-rounder Gongadi Trisha, who complemented her excellent 3/15 with an unbeaten 33-ball 44 while batting.

South Africa, led by Kayla Reyneke, opted to bowl first, but their decision backfired quickly as India's three-pronged spin attack bowled them out for 82.

Left-arm spinner Aayushi Shukla was the star of the show with figures of 4-2-9-2, while leg-spinner Trisha, who has also been a revelation with the bat, further underlined her all-round capabilities with her triple strikes with the ball.

Trisha once again anchored India's chase with an unbeaten knock that was studded with eight fours.

Vice-captain Sanika Chalke (26 not out; 22 balls, 4x4) sealed the victory with a powerful heave to the square-leg boundary, forcing the young Indian players, draped in the Tricolour, to break into wild celebrations.

India got off to a strong start in their chase, scoring briskly with a steady flow of singles and boundaries.

The defending champions enjoyed a flawless campaign, winning all their group-stage matches against the West Indies, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

Their winning momentum continued in the Super Six stage with victories over Bangladesh and Scotland.

In the semi-final, India delivered a commanding performance against England to extend their unbeaten run to six matches —*PTI*

EYES ON HISTORIC WIN

Praaggnandhaa, Gukesh share lead at Tata Steel Masters

WIJK AAN ZEE, 2 FEB

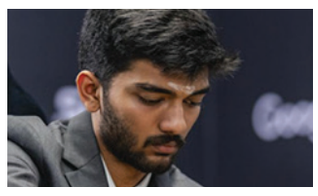


PHOTO: PTI

In a thrilling 12th round of the Tata Steel Masters, World Champion D Gukesh played out a draw against Holland's Jorden van Foreest, while compatriot R Praggnanandhaa secured his third consecutive victory, defeating Alexey Sarana of Serbia. Both Indians now sit atop the leaderboard with 8.5 points, eyeing a historic title win – the first by an Indian in Tata Steel Masters history.

After a promising start, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan suffered defeat at the hands of Arjun Erigaisi and is now unlikely to contend for the title with only 7.5 points.

Praggnanandhaa, playing with the white pieces, demonstrated tactical brilliance against Sarana, executing a stunning piece sacrifice that dismantled his opponent's defence, ultimately leading to checkmate.

Gukesh's match against van Foreest was marked by fluctuating fortunes as he navigated a tense Queen pawn game.

After a period of stalemate, Gukesh's slight miscalculation allowed van Foreest to launch a counterattack, ending in a draw.

Arjun Erigaisi's decisive win over Abdusattorov showcased his strength in the Nimzo-Indian Defence, as he capitalised on his opponent's blunders to clinch victory.

In the challengers' section, Aydin Suleymanli, Nguyen Thai Dai Vam, and Erwin L'Ami share the lead on 8.5 points, while Divya Deshmukh faced defeat against Benjamin Bok.

The final round promises excitement, with Gukesh facing Erigaisi and Praggnanandhaa up against Vincent Keymer. If both matches end in draws, a playoff will determine the champion. —*PTI*

Ashwin: Poetic injustice, a case of pure cricketing miscalculation

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Former India spinner R Ashwin has questioned the use of concussion substitution during the fourth T20I against England, in which medium-pacer Harshit Rana replaced batting all-rounder Shivam Dube, calling it a case of "pure cricketing miscalculation."

Dube, who had scored a half-century, was struck on the head by Jamie Overton off the penultimate delivery of India's innings.

Head coach Gautam Gambhir then effectively used the concussion protocol to field Rana in place of Dube, who bowls at speeds in the early 120 km/h range.

"The game is done. India capture yet another series at home. T20I has been a real juggernaut of a win. But my first question is, did we forgot it was an international game and played an IPL match?," Ashwin said on his hindi YouTube channel 'Ash ki baat'.

"You can call poetic justice, or in fact poetic injustice. I don't understand it. At least earlier, Chahal replaced Jadeja. Here, Harshit Rana replaced Shivam Dube."

The concussion protocol allows a like-for-like replacement, and Rana, a tearaway quick, replaced medium pacer Dube, who is used as an 'impact player' for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL.

India will face England in the final ODI on Sunday. —*PTI*

DAVIS CUP

India outclass Togo with 4–0, Balaji–Bollipalli clinch pair title

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Bollipalli during the Davis Cup 2025 World Group-I play-off match against Togo's Thomas Setodji and Padio Isak **PHOTO: PTI**

N Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli were exemplary in their performances as India secured a decisive 4–0 victory over Togo in the Davis Cup World Group I play-off, held on Sunday at the DLTA Complex. With a 2-0 lead heading into the final day, India needed to win just one of the three matches remaining.

The Indian pair of Balaji and debutant Bollipalli quickly delivered the required victory, triumphing over M'lapa Tingou Akomolo and Hod'abalo Isak Padio in just 57 minutes with a score of 6–2, 6–1. Togo's challenges were compounded by the absence of their top player, Thomas Setodji, who was replaced due to an arm injury.

In the first reverse singles, 21-year-old Karan Singh made an impressive debut, securing a 6-2, 6-3 win while showcasing excellent serving and aggressive returns. Watching closely was his coach, Aditya Sachdeva. Despite a minor lapse when he dropped serve in the second set, Karan displayed remarkable composure throughout.

Balaji's serving was particularly noteworthy, losing just one point on serve. The Indian duo's chemistry was evident as they quickly established control in both sets, leaving Togo struggling to mount a response. With India already securing the tie, both teams opted not to play the fifth rubber, leaving India to celebrate a convincing win. —*PTI*

Hard to go past Aus, India in Champions Trophy, says Ponting

DUBAI, 2 FEB

The legendary Ricky Ponting feels the quality of players and recent history make India and Australia the favourites to compete in the summit clash of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy.

"It's hard to go past India and Australia again," Ponting told the ICC Review.

"Just think about the quality of players in both countries right now, and you look back in recent history when these big finals and big ICC events have come around, and inevitably Australia and India are there somewhere," said the former Australia captain. —*PTI*

Real Madrid's winning streak ends in a shock

MADRID, 2 FEB

Real Madrid's winning run ended in stunning fashion after losing at relegation-threatened Espanyol 1-0 in La Liga. Defender Carlos Romero's late goal beat the La Liga leader and moved Espanyol out of the bottom three. Madrid was made to pay for its missed opportunities five minutes from time when Romero volleyed in Omar El Hilali's cross, much to the home fans' raucous — and surprised — delight.

Madrid, which will face Manchester City in the Champions League knockout playoff round, travelled to Espanyol with 10 victories in its last 11 matches in all competitions.

Back to winning ways

Meanwhile, Atletico de Madrid beat RCD Mallorca 2–0. Atletico went into its match against seventh-placed Mallorca having lost both of its last two league matches after a run of 15 consecutive victories.

Rodrigo Riquelme hit the crossbar with a free kick two minutes from time and provided the through ball for substitute Antoine Griezmann to run onto and delightfully chip the goalkeeper.

Espanyol inched two points clear of the drop zone, while Madrid's lead was cut to one point with Atletico's victory. —*PTI*

K'taka draw against Haryana in Ranji

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Smaran finished the season as Karnataka's top run-scorer, accumulating 516 runs in seven matches **PHOTO: PTI**

Ravichandran Smaran showcased his exceptional talent with an unbeaten century as Karnataka concluded their Ranji Trophy season with a draw against Haryana in their Elite Group C match on Saturday.

Despite the draw, Haryana secured their place in the knockout stages, finishing top of the group with 29 points, while Kerala claimed the second spot with 28. Karnataka ended fourth with 20 points.

Starting the day on 108 for 3, Karnataka faced the challenge of trailing by 38 runs. However, the loss of Devdutt Padikkal (43), KL Shrijith (2), and Yashovardhan Parantap (12) in quick succession left them struggling at 164 for 6. Smaran (133 not out from 217 balls) partnered with Hardik Raj (40) to form a crucial 98-run partnership for the seventh wicket, allowing Karnataka to reach a lead of 114 runs. After extending the lead to 148 with a score of 294 for 8, Haryana conceded the draw, recognising the lack of time for a successful chase.

Smaran finished the season as Karnataka's top run-scorer, accumulating 516 runs in seven matches at an impressive average of 64.50, including two centuries. —*PTI*

TRANSITION TIME

2-tier test format likely before India's England tour

LONDON, 2 FEB

South Africa will face Australia in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June 2025 **PHOTO: X**

The upcoming World Test Championship final between Australia and South Africa will mark the conclusion of the current format, which is set to be restructured into a two-tier system ahead of India's tour of England this summer.

Richard Thompson, chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and head of the ICC's strategic growth committee, has initiated discussions with ICC chairman Jay Shah to outline plans for a "fairer competition." With just five months until England hosts India at Headingley from 20 June, Thompson has emphasised the urgency of developing a more robust framework, stating, "It is fully understood that the current structure does not work in the way it should."

The current model has faced criticism for its inconsistencies, such as nations not playing every other team within the two-year cycle and skewed standings due to an excess of two-Test series. Notably, South Africa reached the final without facing Australia in the current cycle, a scenario that undermines competition integrity.

Further discussions will also evaluate the introduction of four-day Tests, aimed at better accommodating scheduling alongside franchise leagues—though marquee series like the Ashes and tier-one matchups will retain the traditional format.

However, the push for a two-tier system has drawn criticism from cricketing legends, including West Indies great Clive Lloyd and Sri Lanka's Arjuna Ranatunga, who argue that it risks sidelining smaller cricketing nations and is driven by monetary concerns, rather than the spirit of the game. —*PTI*

Dembélé's hat-trick powers PSG to win 5–2 at Brest

PARIS, 2 FEB

Ousmane Dembélé continued his impressive scoring form, netting his second consecutive hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) cruised to a 5-2 victory over Brest, extending their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 13 points ahead of Marseille.

Dembélé's prowess proved decisive, having already scored three goals against Stuttgart in the Champions League earlier this week. The match opened with Bradley Barcola assisting Dembélé for a straightforward finish in the 29th minute. Despite a curling strike from Romain Del Castillo leveling the match for Brest shortly after the half-time break, Dembélé quickly restored PSG's advantage, capitalising on defensive errors.

While Ludovic Ajorque pulled a goal back for Brest in the 71st minute, PSG's attacking force, including two late goals from Gonçalo Ramos, ensured a comfortable win.

Monaco also maintained their pursuit of the top spots by defeating Auxerre 4-2, with new signing Mika Biereth scoring a remarkable hat trick. —*PTI*